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A FOREST OF SYMBOLS

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BY F. M. MACRI, MARGARET JOAN WARD, LAURENT MAILHOT, MARILYN J. DAVIS, JOSEPH PIVATO, NAIM KATTAN, MICHAEL BEAUSANG

Translations

BY JOHN GLASSCO

Review Articles and Reviews

BY ROBIN SKELTON, CHRISTOPHER XERXES RINGROSE, GERMAINE WARKENTIN, HERBERT ROSENGARTEN, ANTHONY APPENZELL, ROWLAND SMITH, PATRICIA MORLEY, EUGENE MCNAMARA, S. E. READ, MIKE DOYLE, LINDA ROGERS, RONALD SUTHERLAND, LEN GASPARINI, COLIN ROSS, RUSSELL M. BROWN

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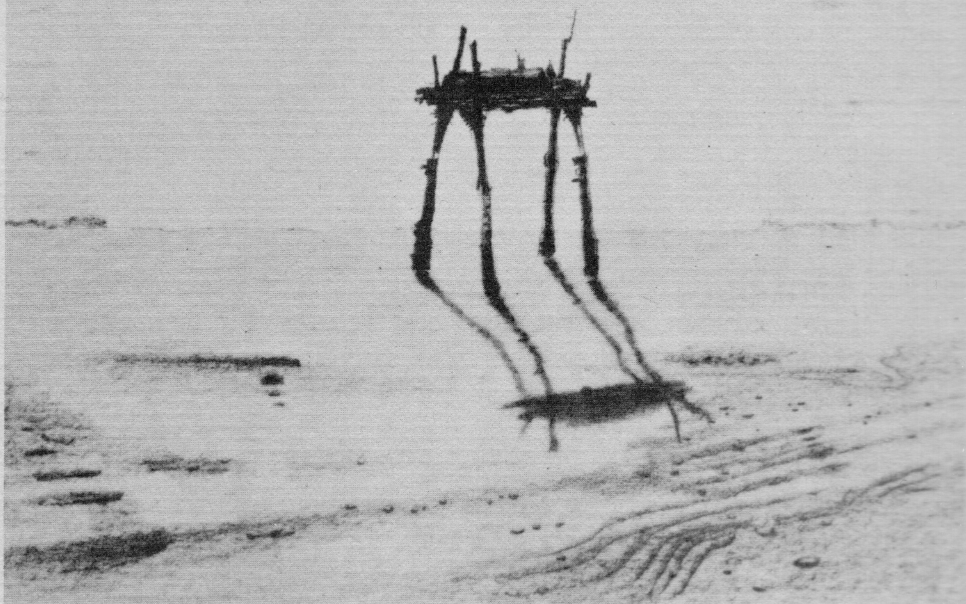

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editorial

NEW-OLD CRITICS

THE PROBLEMS of the dissenting critic are today more complicated than in earlier generations because so many who have followed this direction during the past few years have also been academic teachers of literature, institutional prisoners who have abandoned the independence which earlier writers at least imagined they possessed. This was demonstrated to me with particular emphasis when I read *The Politics of Literature*[1], a symposium by a group of rebel scholars from American and Canadian universities. It is sub-titled "Dissenting Essays on the Teaching of English", but this is misleading, since most of the essays are concerned less with what goes on in the smell of classroom chalk than with the contemporary situation of the academic critic, for none of the contributors — to judge from their lists of works and projects — has any intent of perishing for lack of publication.

A man of the Thirties, I could not help hearing some familiar echoes as I read through these essays. Expressed in tones of political naiveté which one would never encounter in a similar European collection, the viewpoints of the writers extend over a radical spectrum that includes on the left the near-anarchism of Ellen Cantarow, who admires the Wobblies and wept when she read of the CNT communes in Spain, and on the right the antique Russo-Marxism of Bruce Franklin, a latter-day Leninoid whose critical judgment is so ludicrously warped by his politics that he can describe Melville as a "consciously proletarian writer" and write of "reactionary tracts . . . like *Animal Farm* . . . which come right out and say in terms that everyone can understand: Man is a pig." But Franklin talks with an exceptional proselyte's rage, which is perhaps understandable in view of the fact that he was converted in middle age from equally rabid New

Criticism. For the most part the attitudes represented in *The Politics of Literature* reflect a kind of non-partisan and non-passionate radical populism with strains of Marcuse and early Marx.

Most of the writers indeed describe themselves as Marxist critics, but no essay actually makes a direct attempt to apply Marxian concepts to the study of literature. There are only four quotations from Marx and Engels in the whole volume, and the only one of these that refers to criticism actually dismisses it as unimportant, when Marx asserts, in *The German Ideology*, that "not criticism but revolution is the driving force of history, also of religion, of philosophy and all other types of theory." There is only one reference to Georg Lukacs, without whose presence in the shadows one would have thought no volume of modern Marxist criticism complete, and then he appears merely to make a very banal statement, "everything is politics", while the considerable body of important neo-Marxist criticism that has appeared in France during the past decade goes entirely unmentioned. The Marxist critic most often mentioned is Christopher Caudwell, and that I find very significant.

Caudwell, who was revived by Marxist scholars during the 1950s only to be dismissed as superficial and romantic, is now experiencing a Third Coming in left-wing literary circles, and seems to be gaining an acceptance that was denied to him two decades ago. No doubt in a way his return is part of the cyclic cultural pattern by which, having re-enacted Twenties movements like Dada, fashion has moved on a decade, and young intellectuals are vicariously reliving the thrills of the Thirties in the same way as late-night television is reviving the films of the same era. For nostalgia is an important and debilitating element in Leftism as it has developed in the early Seventies, and one cannot accept contemporary campus enthusiasms in the same way as one had to accept the passions of the Thirties which Caudwell validated by a grave beside the Ebro and Orwell with wounds in the cause of socialism and freedom that hastened his death. The aura of the hero and martyr hangs over Caudwell, and, however much one might disagree with his critical viewpoint, there is no doubt of his dedication to what he saw as the revolutionary cause. Undoubtedly some of the essayists in this volume, after their forays with deans and governors, after making in their own minds a Madrid out of Columbia, see themselves as heirs of the Thirties, but history does not repeat itself, and the stances of that decade can no longer convincingly be taken. Thus one has the impression, reading through these campus essays in rebellion, that their authors are really actors, re-enacting with spirit in a kind of living theatre the roles of past revolutionaries — sham Caudwells and

Luxembourgs longing vainly for martyrdom. They are not entirely to blame, for society has learnt to encourage revolutionary role-playing as a safeguard against revolution.

But Caudwell is significant in this context not merely as a Marxist hero towards whom the attitude of official communists has always been somewhat ambiguous. He also represented the more simplistic type of Marxist criticism (which is largely why the British academic Marxists of the 1950s rejected him), and the fact that the writers of *The Politics of Literature* should embrace him so warmly cannot be divorced from the excessive simplism of their own attitudes towards literature as well as politics. "High" literature as it has existed up to the present is seen consistently as a product of "ruling class" culture (and this in spite of the crucial part played by the Russian novelists of the nineteenth century in preparing the intellectual ground for the Russian revolution); "class" in fact becomes a naively convenient explanation for all the anomalies of society and the crises of culture. And, with the exception of the libertarian socialist Ellen Cantarow, none of the writers seems even aware that there are other traditions of dissent, other criticisms of the existing order, which are more deeply impregnated with the freedom they all claim to seek than Marx, that honestly outspoken authoritarian, ever was. Proudhon, Kropotkin, Gandhi, even Paul Goodman, one is surprised to observe, are never mentioned.

Yet *The Politics of Literature* cannot entirely be dismissed as politically naive and critically superficial. Most of the eleven writers are capable of sharp critical judgments in their own fields of study. Lillian S. Robinson, for example, includes in "Who's Afraid of a Room of One's Own?" a penetrating analysis of Virginia Woolf's feminist writings, and Richard Ohmann presents a clear and not unsympathetic survey of New Criticism as a social-literary phenomenon. Others write well on the limitations of modern English Departments as settings for acquiring a vital understanding of literature, and on specific social issues of which they have direct personal experience, like the position of women in academic life.

There is also a group of interesting and less directly polemical essays on experiments in education and study outside the recognized academic channels. I was fascinated by Florence Howe's "Why Teach Poetry?", an account of an experiment which she and some women undergraduates carried out in arousing the appreciation of poetry among high school students on vocational tracks, so successfully that potential motor mechanics revealed shrewd critical insights into the works of poets like Karl Shapiro. Other useful essays stress the need for academic definitions of literature to be expanded "so as to include local works, popular

culture, songs, hymns and oral story-telling", as well as labour songs and such documents as the autobiography of Big Bill Haywood. However, I find it curious that to these academics of the Seventies this should seem a new departure; critics outside the academies were working on such material in the Thirties, when Orwell prepared his splendid essays on popular culture, and in the Forties when A. L. Lloyd was working on English folk songs and the present writer on popular hymns. Perhaps the difference between then and now is that none of us in the past over-estimated the material we studied or tried to suggest that it was in some mysterious way as good as contemporary works of high literature; any such suggestion we would have felt unfair to popular works whose virtue lay in their appropriateness to particular and often very limited social conditions. But perhaps we had an advantage in that we did not have to inflate the importance of our fields of studies to meet the demands of thesis-oriented research programmes.

The failure to recognize the extent of past non-academic work on popular culture is an example of the atmosphere of academic parochialism that impregnates *The Politics of Literature.* The towers from which these essays were written may now be of plastic rather than ivory, their ivy leaves may have been metamorphosed into the foliage of Indian hemp, but the writers remain imprisoned within the university ambience to such an extent that they still regard it — like their despised predecessors of the 1950s — as the centre of literary culture and the source of all significant criticism, from which the revolution in literature must have its beginnings. Not only are all the contributors past or present university teachers, but most of them have found the zenith of their political activities in the conclaves of the Modern Languages Association, doubtless in accordance with the old Marxist illusion that by seizing the institutions of power and prestige the rebel can transform them, whereas in fact it is the rebel who is transformed, like a figure in a fairy tale, when he enters such enchanted portals.

Literary developments in recent years are seen by the essayists of *Politics in Literature* almost wholly in the context of what has happened on the campuses, so that in their lengthy introductory essay Louis Kampf and Paul Lauter claim that "academic repression" "has helped to limit the re-establishment of a left-wing literary culture" in recent years, a statement which one cannot imagine any critic or even any academic scholar making before the Fifties when the universities began to draw writers in large numbers into their employ and a powerful campus movement of literary exegesis, the New Critics, came near to dominating critical thought in the United States.

The shadow of the New Critics hangs heavily over *Politics in Literature*, which in one sense is a manifesto of liberation from New Critical domination of English Departments in North America. The editors contrast the methods of close textual analysis which that school favoured to what they call "traditional criticism" which "tried to relate the experience of literature more intimately to the rest of the readers' lives"; the attitude of their contributors varies from the hysterical denunciations of the former believer, Bruce Franklin, who describes New Criticism as "a conscious counter-attack on rising proletarian culture" (he never tells us where that elusive proletarian culture was in fact to be found rising), to the saner comments of Richard Ohmann, who defends the New Critics from the charge of reactionary tendencies, grants that they represent a genuine offshoot of liberal thought, but contends that their rejection of politics cannot be sustained in the world as it is.

It is evident that, in assuming the roles which the New Critics rejected, the authors of *The Politics of Liberation* are linked with these predecessors in a line of rebellious filiation; for their view is as limited to the academic horizon as that of any New Critic, which distinguishes them from some of the academic rebels of the late Sixties. "In 1971," says Ellen Cantarow, "it is clear that dropping out is not a viable alternative, but that what is needed is the creation of an intelligentsia a large part of which engages in active political work"; the editors "propose that teachers of literature . . . should conceive as central to their *work* entering actively into political struggle." In other words, so far as critics are concerned the political struggle must emanate from the classroom and be expressed in the teaching and analysis of literature, though the editors also grant that there are "no simple, direct, one-to-one relationships between literature and action." If this means that in the last resort these campus radicals are not prepared actually to subordinate their literary sensibilities to their political aims, all to the good, but a reading of their essays does not convince me that this is the case. Most of them, despite occasional weak denials that they are advocating socialist realism, in fact present a rather sentimental recreation of the view taken by Stalinists and Maoists alike that literature is significant only as an instrument of the power struggle.

One cannot deny that there may be uses for a book of this kind. It is good, for instance, that critical moulds which have grown rigid should be broken, and it is also good that university teachers should at last come to recognize what *their* critics have long been saying, that "specialization breeds privilege, privilege generates more specialization, both isolate teachers from the concern of students

and, often, of the society generally." Yet it is not always easy to square such a desire for the doors and windows to be thrown open on to the world with the *actual* ignorance which all these writers display of the living tradition of criticism that has flourished outside the universities, largely unaffected by the great rift which the New Critics created between the Thirties and the Fifties.

For even in our age what the editors call "traditional criticism" has continued, relating literature to life, and the study of literature has by no means been monopolized by university teachers. One has only to think of Orwell, of Edmund Wilson, V. S. Pritchett, Dwight Macdonald, Herbert Read, to realize that a strong current of what Northrop Frye has called "practical criticism" still continued, carrying on the traditions of Hazlitt and Ruskin, of Arnold and James, and developing a synthetic approach that gave due value to every aspect of a work of literature. That line of criticism has never lost sight of the social context from which literature emerges, it has never denied that writing has political resonances, but it has regarded works of any art not only as the instruments for changing men's minds and consequently society, but also as the flowerings of the human will that transcend while they illuminate our present condition. Critics must be politically conscious, but they must also realize that to read a poem as a political manifesto is to destroy it as a poem. Literature is not included in, but includes politics.

GEORGE WOODCOCK

NOTE

[1] *The Politics of Literature: Dissenting Essays on the Teaching of English*, edited by Louis Kampf and Paul Lauter. Random House of Canada. $11.95.

ANNE HEBERT

Story and Poem

F. M. Macri

ANNE HÉBERT's story, *Le Torrent*, and its relation to the rest of French-Canadian literature takes on the same significance as does the relation between an ancient House and its coat of arms. It can be argued that the story is a zenith point within the tradition to which it belongs. It is like an emblem, an heraldic legend typifying the house it comes from.

Mlle. Hébert's position in the literary history of French Canada speaks for itself. She follows after the poet Saint-Denys-Garneau and comes before the writers of *la révolution tranquille*. Any reading of her work will immediately reveal its hermetic and personal qualities. Anne Hébert belongs in a tradition of privateness established by Emile Nelligan in the late nineteenth century, taken up by Saint-Denys Garneau in the twentieth, and brought to its high point by herself. But it is exactly this kind of poetry that represents a most significant step in the development of French-Canadian literature. It represents a break with the past and an exposure to contemporary influences. In addition, a certain congruency of images and symbols in the work of these three poets makes it accessible, and renders it understandable within the whole perspective of literary history. We are not limited to interpretations of personal anguish and experience, and of an almost manichean dualism; diligent study has provided a bounty of information concerning the literary influences on these writers, and recently attempts have been made to treat their work in a highly non-subjective way.[1]

Le Torrent[2] is most accessible through its superficial meaning, through its theme of conflict. It has been stated above that the story is emblematic; as such, it represents the duality that has always characterized French-Canadian literature: the division of being. The same is manifested by the use and opposition

of particular symbols. Water opposed to dryness invites life; the closed room or house opposed to the open land or water invites death. This opposition reflects the archetypal conflict between the flesh and the spirit. The lesson to be learned here is that the traditional life of the spirit is really the death of the flesh, not its mere suppression but its death: a paradox indicating the seriousness of the division of being. The persona will try to escape this division through a destruction of the traditional notion of life and an assertion of life by the physical senses, to reinstate the natural equilibrium of existence.

At once the struggle between instinct and reason becomes apparent. The struggle is engendered by a clash of orthodoxy and unorthodoxy of values. From this observation, one can proceed to an interpretation of opposition between the official collective order and the unofficial individual attempts to obliterate that order. The result is *dédoublement*, the splitting of the personality by two equally strong forces.[3] The same opposition and splitting characterizes the early poetry of Anne Hébert. Her late poetry is an affirmation of freedom and new life. The dramatic action of the poetry is conveyed through uniform symbols found also in her fiction. The images and symbols can be reduced to a basic concept expressed in the author's total work; that is, to the concept of time and space and its particular relation to the poetic persona.

From her earliest poems,[4] we observe the author's nascent vision of life and existence as a closed space containing no time but the past. Naturally, such a view leads from happy contemplation to disrupting alienation. The past of childhood becomes oppressive, and a closed existence becomes a permanent present. There follows a progressive, almost systematic, delineation of images and symbols conveying the sterile condition of a static existence: faded flowers, past memories, lost happiness, sombre dwellings, closed rooms and houses, impenetrable windows and doors, dusty furniture, ashes, mirrors, hydrophobia, claustrophobia, claustrophilia, and finally, the ultimate irreducible dark space of the coffin and tomb. The whole impact of such imagery will be vividly presented in a key poem, "Le tombeau des rois".[5] Here, a descent into the grave of a dead past provides the only means of exiting into a present time which will turn naturally into future. The future of time is affirmed in the collection called, *Mystère de la Parole.*

In *Le Torrent*, meaning can be intensified by a more profound analysis. The central conflict in the story does not merely reflect an opposition between the Conscious and the Subconscious, the former represented by Claudine the mother, the latter by François the son and narrator, and by the action of the Torrent of

water on him.[6] The Mother image in French-Canadian literature embodies more than a sumbol for the individual Conscious. In *Le Torrent* the Mother represents a collectivity and an established order of life. Because of the importance of this figure in the literary history of French Canada and its relatively dominant position in the major portion of our literature in French, the Mother cannot perforce be a limited symbol. Indeed, if she is archetypal in Québec, all the ambiguities of such a portent must be taken into account. Claudine, therefore, is not solely François' external world but also a disruptive part of his inner world. She is part of the Self, conscious and unconscious. She represents land, duty, religion, country, culture, the past and the present. If the same mother-figure symbolizes for Emile Nelligan a protective barrier against a threatening real world, for Anne Hébert she symbolizes a protective barrier that threatens self-annihilation. And the poet is aware of this. Similarly, the image of the Garden, a place of refuge, a protective *locus amoenus*, takes on the same ambivalent characteristics. It is a haven whose dangers are hidden under a soporific guise of goodness. A mother's arms, a pleasant garden enclosure are in reality stifling because they guard against the contradictions of life's forces, or they repress any tentative action towards the full acceptance of life. The whole process resembles the contraction of a coiled insect when subjected to a sharp exterior stimulus: "J'étouffe dans un jardin/ . . . /Laissez-moi donc dormir!", exclaims the persona.[7] We observe in this poem a skillful combination of two images, the garden and the room, which together convey an extremely strong feeling of suffocation or living-death. The garden is in this case the flowery wall-paper of the bedroom.

THE NARRATION in *Le Torrent* divides into two identifiable parts with rising and falling intensity. The action intensified by the extreme repression suffered by François, repression by his mother's will, and his own repression of the pull towards the instinctual life of the Torrent also resembles the contraction of the insect. This reaction climaxes in François' sudden deafness, the result of being struck by the mother, and in the sudden importance of the dominating Torrent:[8]

> . . . I had become deaf.
> From that day on, a fissure opened in my oppressed life. The heavy silence of deafness overcame me, and a proneness to dreams, a kind of companionship, invaded my existence. No voice, no noise from the exterior touched me any more.

> No more the crash of the nearby falls, no more the song of the cricket. I was certain of this. Yet I heard the Torrent existing within me, and with it, our house and the whole of our land. I did not possess the world, but this one thing had changed: a part of the world possesed me. The land with its water, mountains and deep caves held me in its mighty grip.[9]

Once the narrator is drawn into the world of nature, he experiences a whirlpool of sensations and feelings. Though the Torrent represents a physical symbol of repressed existence, it also becomes the image of the narrator's actual condition: turbulency, loss of direction, loss of power, absence of will, full domination by external natural forces. Furthermore, the narrator's inability to control his new condition, constitutes a falling action. He recognizes his condition but cannot direct it away from what seems to be a fatal course. Like the horse, Perceval, unable to be broken by the mother, François desires escape from her cruel attempts to break his ego. Because of his deafness, and because of the Torrent's hold over him, François begins truly to experience the duality of his existence and the conflict between life in nature and death by reason; whereas in the first half of the narrative all he knew was the absolute control of his mother's will, now he suddenly finds himself open to himself, unprotected and exposed to a more intense struggle.

IN THE COLLECTION of poems, *Le Tombeau Des Rois*, there is a progression of images that perfectly describes the poetic journey undertaken by the persona and the dark journey undertaken by François. It proceeds from water and fluid images to more solid imagery, from these through the familiar images of closed rooms and houses to the final tomb image. A sampling of titles is enough to prove this: "Eveil au seuil d'une fontaine", "Sous la pluie", "Les grandes fontaines", "Les pêcheurs d'eau", "Les mains", "Nuit", "La voix de l'oiseau", "Les petites villes", "La fille maigre", "La chambre fermée", "La chambre de bois", "Nos mains au jardin", "Vie de château", "Le tombeau des rois". Each step of the way to the end has its appropriate victim. In the first poem the victim is a sleepy persona who is ignorant of the water's dangerous enchantment. *Les grandes fontaines* are found deep in a forest. Only fear prevents one from going to them, fear of what the water may reflect, fear of its power to steal the body out of its protective dream-world. A bird is caught by *les pêcheurs d'eau*. The persona glimpses an inverted image of a garden in the

water, caught there as if in a watery net. Hands are the subject of the very next poem. They are washed in colour; they become a pitiable offering or gesture under the sun's rays. *Nuit* becomes the dark waters of engulfment. In this darkness, the heart becomes a blinking searchlight sending out an unrecognizable signal. But every time the light hits the eyes, the eyes close like the contracting insect, preferring the safety of nighttime. A dead bird's voice ("La voix d'une oiseau") in an unknown wood replaces the undecipherable code. The wood is a black isle, it is captivity: "De mois à l'oiseau/ . . . /Nul passage/Nul secours" (p. 25). *Les petites villes* are those of the past, of childhood, containing lifeless parks and gardens. Barren of wind and water, these enclosures are like museums, their amusements lined up in rows. They engender a condition of living-death. The body in "La fille maigre" is reduced to its smallest living dimension, a skeleton. The flaying of the Self not only suggests a ritualized aggression, but, as in the poem by Saint-Denys Garneau ("Cage d'oiseau"), it represents the final stage of alienation, the balance between living-death and real death.

Then follow the closed and wooden rooms that imprison the body as well as the spirit. The rooms represent the historical past and the reaches of sterility. Their wood is ancient, permeated with fatal odours. These images of imprisonment and suffocation are enlarged and given a more explicit meaning. Existence in the ancestral manor is characterized by its qualities of absence of objects and people that would make it livable otherwise. Only the persona inhabits this place, a hall of mirrors. The split of the Self is symbolized by reflection in the polished glass. The Original and its Double contemplate each other, narcissistically, in the glass waters. The Double retains his traditional idiosyncrasies, he is Death announcing death. He resides under the quicksilver of the mirror. Being an exact copy of the Original, he sticks to his victim; like seaweed, says the poet. Together, they simulate an act of love, a perversion of love.

The result of division by conflicting forces is alienation of the Self. In the story, before the horse's escape and the mother's death, François had only experienced denial and absence; denial of love, childhood and any physical life; absence of other humans. His completely isolated and guarded existence is symbolized by the confines of a daily routine of chores and prayers, by maternal decree, and by the figurative significance of the house. He is thoroughly dispossessed. At the seminary where he is sent to learn self-denial and holiness, he learns only loneliness and fear. He keeps away from his fellow students because he cannot know them. They are the outside, the temptations of evil, of life beyond the eternal vigilance of the self. Thus, his isolation is final.

Alienation, therefore, is the movement inwards away from exterior existence into the very narrow keep of repression. Extreme denial of anything connected with real life produces a condition that must lead to actual death, for the grave or coffin is its ultimate symbol. The splitting of the personality on the surface takes the form of loneliness or solitude. Underneath this isolation, the Self undergoes successive change induced by the storm and stress of surface conditions, causing the persona to experience desperate need for contact of any kind with any other human. Frustration of these needs causes increased division of the Ego. Finally, the desperation of such an irreparable state produces complete confusion, total exposure to the dividing forces, final collapse of rational existence. The extent of this alienation begins to unwind in the second part of *Le Torrent*, at the narrator's fascination with the horse, Perceval, ending with the last paragraph of the story. The attempt to escape such existence, which constitutes the action of the second half, is the first made in the work of Anne Hébert.

The mother dead, he is left to himself. Gradually, as he perceives the static condition of his sterile life, he feels the effects of utter solitude and isolation, and then of alienation. His life is referred to as pointless in time and space, without centre. The feelings of absolute loneliness are intensified by despair. It is too late to recapture life. The moment this is perceived is a moment of revelation, for the narrator knows then that he must follow events to their end. His previous subjection to the Torrent had left him without direction. The events he must follow are a surge of activity that bring François to experience a nightmarish recognition of his utter desolation. He must endure a series of irreversible experiences. He becomes tormented by desire for woman, and goes out to find her. Each impulse to act, to counter passivity, is met by a painful reminder of his split existence, something which in itself prevents positive action. In order to find a woman, he must confront and admit to his solitude. Doing so, he bears witness to his alienation.

The girl he brings home, Amica, in many ways resembles the horse Perceval: in spirit, in mystery, and in appearance, with blue-black hair like the blue-black skin and mane of his stallion. She is the unknown, the purity of physical and instinctual life. But François can only suffer from his encounter with her:

> I observe the alien couple during its wedding night.
> I am the wedding guest.

This splitting into actor and spectator, not only forms the premise for the narration; it also occurred as such at the exact moment when François is struck

deaf by Claudine. The splitting results from an ever-present conflict, for the mother prolongs her domination over the narrator right up to the end. Being dead, she truly becomes the symbol of the devastation wreaked by the order she symbolizes. Such destruction pushes François to the very limits of his existence. The necessity voiced by the Torrent in his pounding temples invites him to a final and complete discovery of the unknown.

The prospect of being found out by the girl, of being destroyed by her presence and the demands it makes upon him, drive François mad with fever and delirium. She represents possible destruction or invasion, not simply because she may discover the secret concerning her mother's death, but because she has invaded all possibilities of concealment that François previously enjoyed; she has opened up all the closed spaces of his external and internal life. She has penetrated all the locked rooms of the house and stripped him of his last private refuge, robbed him of submergence into the deepest part of himself. Once she is gone, there remains only one thing to confront: complete and absolute solitude, final and irrevocable alienation. As if to confirm this, the narrator announces:

> Who will teach me the way out? I am alone, alone inside of myself.

To escape the pain of his conscious existence, François must push away its constricting effects, must attempt the final "adventure" of life:

> I bend over as far as I can. I want to see the whirling abyss from as close as possible. I want to lose myself in this adventure. My one and only appalling possession.

The story ends with an attempt to reclaim life in its fully ambivalent state. It is also escape into the unknown, the last potential means of becoming one with the rush of the Torrent and all it represents.

In the poem, "Le tombeau des rois", a similar journey or adventure can be observed, a similar escape into an unknown future. The descent into the tomb is a Thesian voyage through the labyrinth of the mind, or of the soul and body. The reduction of the closed spaces of the persona's existence is contained in the image of the grave. The grave as the dimension of death is absolute. It is both breathless and fathomless, like the gulf or the abyss; it is an unescapable enclosure. This image is used to project the conditions of living-death. The nature of actual death can only be induced or imagined, as François imagines it to be "mon aventure, ma seule et épouvantable richesse". Anne Hébert's persona in-

duces the nature of actual death from the particulars of her experience throughout the progression of poems in *Les Songes en Equilibre* (1942) and *Le Tombeau des Rois* (1953). In this title poem of the second collection, actual death becomes identified with dead kings, and the experience of it is recreated in the rape of the persona, seven times by seven tall Pharaohs. After a symbolic real death, the persona is freed from its living-death and moves towards the dawn at the end of the long tunnel of the tomb.

THE JOURNEY THROUGH THE DARKNESS begins with the persona carrying her heart on a fist, bearing it like a lamp to light the way. Within the tomb lie the remains of all that was human, the remains of past mythologies and civilisations, and a vestigial attraction for the gems and bones of a dead existence. The heart is a sightless bird that breathes and trembles strangely whenever the attraction becomes too dangerous. In the bony embrace of the kings, a dry hand searches for the heart to break it. In the end, the rites of death having passed, the dream finishes, a reawakening occurs:

> Livid and satiated with the horrible dream
> My limbs freed
> And the dead thrust out of me, assassinated,
> What glimmer of dawn strays in here?
> Wherefore does this bird quiver
> And turn toward morning
> Its blinded eyes?[10]

Liberation of the Self depends on confrontation with death. To be initated into life, one must die, literally or symbolically, in order to be reanimated. François' end allows him to experience the unknown, and therefore his new adventure could possibly be a new beginning. The persona of the poem is released into the light once more, and her affirmation of life unfolds in *Mystère de la Parole* where every word, act or gesture is a fiat. The title poem vividly asserts that the word can be made flesh. The word-maker lives by naming things. The poetic consecration of life is thus a creative process:

> Que celui qui a reçu fonction de la parole vous prenne
> en charge comme un coeur ténébreux de surcroit, et
> n'ait de cesse que soient justifiés les vivants et les morts
> en un seul chant parmi l'aube et les herbes.[11]

All the closed spaces of the Self are opened up by the destruction of the symbols of isolation and solitude. Poem titles again convey the feeling of transformation: "Naissance du pain", "Alchimie du jour", "Je suis la terre et l'eau", "Printemps sur la ville", "La ville tuée", "Annonciation", "Eve", "Des dieux captifs". Symbols and images previously given a negative and morbid function now metamorphose into positive and vivid meanings. Snow, birds, water, landscape no longer convey a perverse condition of alienation; they are shorn of their previous uniformity. Instead of a blanket of death, snow becomes a natural element complete with all its ambivalent characteristics. It is negative when it tempts one into a prison of dreams and sterile purity, positive when it is made a natural compliment to existence. Birds fly free. Water flows as blood flows. Landscape is divested of any static qualities. Time is freed and allowed to fill the immensities of space.

The idea and image of the Torrent form the symbolic foundation of François' narration, just as the idea and image of the tomb from the symbolic foundation of the collection and its title poem, "Le Tombeau des Rois". In both cases, the fundamental component has a distinctly ambivalent quality; it evinces negative and positive characteristics at the same time. Ambivalence constitutes the necessary element in the drama of Anne Hébert's total work. Without attraction there can be no repulsion, and the poetic drama is animated by such a process. The Torrent is an aggregate of opposites, destructive and creative. The Tomb as an aggregate symbol represents the logical end of a progression marked by opposition. All the images and metaphors of preceding poems are resolved by the final descent underground. The light of day at the end of the descent into the tomb provides an indication of a non-destructive resolution. It leads literally into the mysteries of creation. We can conclude that the duality of existence cannot be resolved, but that the persona can accept its dialectic and use it creatively. The Self will then cease to be split by physical and metaphysical forces. What takes place in Anne Hébert's last poems is the exploration of the mystery of new life, and the wonderment and affirmation of anything and everything.

There is this final comment to be made on the implication of *Le Torrent* for French-Canadian literature. In Anne Hébert's story, the characters and events are the parts of a collective consciousness: Claudine is *la femme canadienne*, an enduring but perverted Maria Chapdelaine; François represents the effected offspring of the former, the depersonalized male, empty ownership, the disjointed Self, the disinherited heir seeking reintegration with his surroundings; Perceval and Amica are personifications of the land, of natural life. Together, these

characters and symbols form the dramatic opposition that constitutes the central activity of the French-Canadian, and indeed the Canadian, literary tradition.

NOTES

[1] See Gilles Houde's study in *La Barre du Jour*, and papers given at the conference, *Poet and Critic*, November 1969 at the University of Alberta, Edmonton. See note 6.

[2] Anne Hébert, *Le Torrent* (Montréal, 1963). The story was written in 1945. This edition also contains other short stories by the author.

[3] See Albert Le Grand, "Ann Hébert: de l'exil au royaume", *Etudes Françaises*, 4, 1 (1968), complete article.

[4] *Les Songes en équilbre* (Montréal, 1942).

[5] In *Poémes* (Paris, 1960). This collection contains two collections, *Le Tombeau des Rois* (1953) and *Mystère de la Parole* (1960).

[6] Gilles Houde, "Les symboles et la structure mythique de Torrent", *La Barre du Jour*, no. 16 and 21.

[7] *Les Songes en équilbre*, p. 69.

[8] *Le Torrent*, p. 29.

[9] My translation.

[10] Anne Hébert, "The Tomb of Kings", trans. by F. R. Scott, *Saint-Denys Garneau: Anne Hébert, translations/traductions* (Vancouver, 1962), p. 47.

[11] *Mystère de la Parole*, title poem, p. 75.

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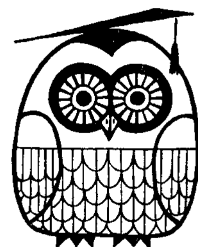

THE GIFT OF GRACE

Margaret Joan Ward

FROM HIS FIRST NOVEL, Morley Callaghan appears a prophet of gloom. He writes almost exclusively about the people on the edge of society: about the non-conformist, the negro, the alcoholic, the prostitute, the criminal. Most of them are doomed to destruction. With one or two exceptions, those who survive have little left beyond their will to live.

How can this hell he creates be reconciled with Callaghan's own statement in *That Summer in Paris*: "My problem was to relate a Christian enlightenment to some timeless process of becoming"? His intention appears to be the examination of Christian faith as it impinges on human existence in this world, not in the finality of the world hereafter. The basic message of Christianity is the good news of redemption from evil as presented in the person of Jesus Christ. Implied in this theme are the beliefs that man has responsibility for his own situation, however desperate, that man must sincerely desire to change his life, and that he is dependent on the grace of God to effect such change. Callaghan's concern with the redemptive process is illustrated by his use of the Biblical themes of the prodigal or lost son, of the lost sheep, and of Lazarus. All these present in some way the return to life from death or from a state analogous to death.

If redemption has human significance, each man must be able to choose regeneration and life or to refuse it. The concept of free will appears critical for Callaghan's religious position. His characters are the ideal testing ground since they represent the most restricted and hopeless elements in society. Many of his novels explore the possibility of free will and individual responsibility, both through an apparent acceptance of naturalism in his early novels, and later through an examination of communism.

A naturalistic determinism dominates *Strange Fugitive*, Callaghan's first novel. Harry Trotter is at once a helpless victim of the forces driving him and a willing accomplice in avoiding a sense of responsibility for his own fate. His violent death seems inevitable. But he yearns for Vera and the world where relationships were true and right, where he gained status by being the man of the household.

That is, he aspires to a position of responsibility, however limited. His longing for Vera and his first tentative move toward her when he realizes he may face death are evidence of Callaghan's uneasiness in the naturalistic deterministic position, an uneasiness borne out by his later novels. Michael Aikenhead in *They Shall Inherit the Earth* wrestles with his sense of guilt over Dave Choate's drowning by trying to blame the tragedy on unsatisfactory family relationships and on his father as pivotal in them. Nevertheless in his ultimate assumption of responsibility, he denies the validity of total determinism.

After his earliest novels, Callaghan rejects a deterministic position, developing his view of a limited free will against the challenge of communism. Charlie Stewart of *Such Is My Beloved* and William Johnson of *They Shall Inherit the Earth* both try to explain prostitution in purely economic terms. The only solution they can offer is revolution and the ensuing radical social change. They deny the value of the individual. William Johnson says of Anna Prychoda: "She's an illustration of a larger issue and you can't stop to worry about her." Michael's intervention in Huck Farr's seduction of Anna indicates his sense of responsibility toward her as an individual, and implies his rejection of an impersonal radical position.

In *A Passion in Rome*, Callaghan through Sam Raymond's words relates the sense of personal worth to eternity and God:

> I'm telling you, the Christian, about resurrection . . . Out of the ruins of her life. That look that comes on her face. Something in her spirit survives. It's got to survive. It's the divine spark.

Despite the emphasis Callaghan places on external pressures which compel certain sorts of behaviour, he affirms that the individual can and does choose his way. Michael argues with Nathanael Benjamin that "If the passions overwhelm you you can hardly be free." Although he angrily rejects Benjamin's reply — "You might be just free enough to have just a little influence on whatever happens" — yet he finds Benjamin's outlook on life so attractive that finally Anna's jealousy is aroused.

Callaghan maintains a tension, however, between a man's sense of responsibility and the social pressures which denude him of it. Society, he recognizes, tends to destroy the sense of individual worth: through the economic forces leading Ronnie and Midge to prostitution, through the conflicts destroying the Aikenhead family, through the refusal of society to support Kip Caley's efforts at reform, through the prejudices against non-conformists such as Peggy Sander-

son and against negroes, through the injustices of public opinion destroying Harry Lane's reputation, and finally through the circumstances forcing Anna Connel into dissolution.

The collective pressures toward evil are somewhat moderated through social conformity and justice, which create a beautiful pattern paralleling that of natural law. Michael Aikenhead, on his hunting trip, understands that the death of one creature brings life for another. Father Dowling sees the role of the two prostitutes as scapegoats so that society can maintain the health of its structure. Society, like nature, subordinates the welfare of the individual to that of the whole. In both, the only expectation can be death. The social process proves almost as deterministic as naturalism and is as destructive of individual worth. Jim McAlpine describes social rules as being rather like a hockey game: "Anything that breaks the pattern is bad. And Peggy breaks up the pattern."

SINCE NO PERSON can totally escape from society, each is implicated in the evil of its injustices. He participates in guilt just by being what he is. Scotty comes in Harry's delirium to reproach him: "If you weren't like you are, would I have become what I am?" Sam Raymond sums up: "The whole human race hasn't had any innocence for about twenty-five thousand years." In this sense, man is involved in original sin and is under moral judgment.

Despite his freedom of choice, man's predicament is so desperate that he may find his own powers inadequate to effect a radical change. Without the impetus of an outside force, he may in effect be enslaved by society and by his own inadequate nature. All he can expect is the inexorable justice of nature, where his death is part of the pattern and where his individuality is irrelevant. Grace is therefore essential for his redemption. By the end of *They Shall Inherit the Earth*, Michael in his weakness cries out for the mercy that has already come to him unrecognized in the person of Anna:

> I only know that Anna will have to die, and it won't be unjust. But I don't want justice. Who on this earth ever really wanted justice? . . . My God, have pity on me. I don't want justice, I want mercy. Have pity on me.

Insight comes, as to Michael, in moments of crisis. Harry Lane gains understanding in the nightmare of temporary paralysis. Anna Connel submits to Sam's

creative will only after she has become incapacitated by her terror of solitude. Michael Aikenhead is reaching toward this concept when he tells Anna: "They say suffering draws men to God . . . Suffer and you have a chance of finding God."

To accept regenerative mercy, man must not only desire it, he must acknowledge his own guilt, both as an individual and as a member of society. It is only after Andrew and Michael Aikenhead both admit their involvement in Dave's drowning that a meaningful relation is possible, for the process of shifting blame divides them. Harry Lane must finally admit that, despite his legal innocence, his personality and social position invited Scotty both to envy and to exploit him, and that therefore he too bore moral guilt for the tragedy.

Recognition of guilt and desire for change open the way for a new quality in relationships. Harry Lane's life and feelings for others have been distorted by his obsession for proving himself innocent before society. Yet in the crisis at the hospital and in the final vulnerability of Mike Kon, Harry understands that innocence without compassion can destroy himself and others:

> Did he imagine he could appear in court and try to serve two masters; the one longing for a world of new relationships with people, and the other one . . . clinging desperately to this last remnant, a comeback triumph in court in the jailing of Mike Kon?

By staying away from court, Harry moves toward the world of new relationships where love assumes responsibility for the fate of the other person as Harry ultimately does for Mike.

Once a person has entered into the new dimension of relationship, he experiences a freedom he has never known before. For Michael Aikenhead, the assumption of responsibility so that he can free his father will also free himself. He is no longer oppressed by his involvement in Dave's drowning and by the fear that revelation will destroy his relationship with Anna. He can now approach the freedom and richness of Anna's emotional life:

> She gave herself to everything that touched her, she let herself be, she lost herself in the fulness of the world, and in losing herself she found the world, and she possessed her own soul.

The despair of daily life is transmuted by love into the richness of the more abundant life promised by Christ.

The central theme of Christianity is that God's grace becomes comprehensible

as it is manifested through the divine-human person of Jesus Christ. Men may continue to encounter God's grace mediated by the Holy Spirit through human personality. Many of Callaghan's characters learn new responses through the love and faith of others. Kip Caley reforms under Father Butler's influence and withstands the ultimate test of his reform through the supportive power of Julie's love.

Although the Church is traditionally regarded as the channel of grace, regenerative power does not necessarily flow through it. In so far as the Church admits worldly values, an expedient necessary for its survival as a social force, it diverges from its redemptive vision. It is precisely its officials, the Bishops of *Such Is My Beloved* and *More Joy in Heaven*, those responsible for its temporal welfare, who have least faith in regeneration. The extreme form is represented by Peggy Sanderson's father, who so far compromised his faith with social values that he lost his belief in God. Although some priests, such as Father Butler and Father Dowling, are vehicles of love, they are suspect by the Church hierarchy and by the orthodox and devout. Apparently regenerative power does not flow through the structure of the Church but rather through the individual who, in his interaction with other individuals, mediates divine love and grace.

Such love is at once intensely personal and particular, and redemptive. Although the Bishop is compelled to reject Father Dowling's behaviour and attitude towards the prostitutes, he cannot suppress the suspicion that in this relationship Father Dowling is approaching divine love:

> Father Dowling in the beginning may have loved them in a general way and, of course, that was good. His love for them became too concrete . . . From the general to the particular, the conception expressed in the image . . . From the word to the flesh, from the general to the particular, the word made flesh.

And his thoughts echo the Gospel:

> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God . . . And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us. (John 1:1, 14)

The passage from *Such Is My Beloved* suggests that the Word or message of redemption embodied in Christ might also find expression in the love of a priest (or of a woman such as Anna Prychoda). Similarly it is in Julie's love, not through physical passion but through her reckless commitment to Kip as a person of great intrinsic worth, that his life finally assumes meaning. In the end Kip can comfort her that she has brought him life. Significantly, Father Dowling spends

his lucid moments in the mental institution writing a commentary on The Song of Songs, a highly sensuous book and an epitome of the concrete and particular, which Church Fathers have allegorized to represent Christ's love for the Church.

THE PERSON bringing redemption is not, however, totally identified with Christ. He remains rooted in society and its corruption. Father Dowling, as a priest of the Catholic church, that is in his social role, cannot condone birth control, the only feasible help for the Canzano family, yet he can spend himself in trying to bring a new life to two prostitutes who are the product of homes as inadequate as the Canzanos'. His motives raise doubts. He desires glory, it seems, in winning even the hopeless to God, and he needs to convince himself that he really loves God by loving the dregs of society.

Peggy Sanderson, another "saint", bestows her love on social outcasts, particularly on negroes. Although there is always the suggestion that she is sexually corrupt, she gives many people a sense of her innocence and purity. In fact, Jim McAlpine sees Peggy as a kind of St. Joan, who "lived and acted by her own secret intuitions." It is never clear whether her secret intuitions are the result of special insight or of some abnormal psychopathology arising from her childhood experiences with negroes and from profound disillusionment with her father.

The redemptive person himself needs the regeneration which comes through an existential relationship. By restoring Anna Connel to a fulfilling life, Sam Raymond finds new direction in the apparent dead-end of his own. The same process is suggested when Harry Lane assumes responsibility for Mike Kon, or Anna Prychoda for Michael Aikenhead. Acknowledging that he is his brother's keeper releases the individual from his private bondage and produces the characteristically radical life-vision.

Many of Callaghan's "saints" invite their own destruction. The personal charismatic vision, the living by secret intuitions, challenges the accepted patterns of society. Where Peggy touches one person, she antagonizes many. There is in her relationships the contrast between the church, her purity and wisdom, and the leopard, the destructive forces within her and directed toward her by society. Father Dowling can marvel that so wealthy a man as Mr. Robison could be so fine a Christian. Yet he fails to understand that his chief danger lies with just such Christians whose concept of their own goodness is judged by his ideals.

Kip Caley is destroyed because he does not conform to the preconceived pat-

tern for the returned prodigal. When, through his sense of responsibility to Foley and Kerrmann rather than to social mores, he is involved in the shooting of a policeman, everyone assumes he has betrayed a trust:

> It was necessary that he be hanged in order that their pride and self-respect might be redeemed, that they might be cleansed of their humiliation, and that the pattern of law and order be finally imposed on him.

The social pattern of law and order is the antithesis of the redemption and cleansing made available through the grace of love. Because of the drive to maintain the status quo, Father Dowling is certified insane, Peggy Sanderson is raped and strangled, St. Joan is burned at the stake, and Christ is crucified.

Morley Callaghan rarely presents a dogmatic answer to any problem, or any explicit affirmation of his religious belief. Indeed the ambiguity of many of his characters precludes such a statement. Yet the pattern of regeneration to which he repeatedly turns is firmly rooted in Christian doctrine: man's fundamental involvement in social guilt, the importance of accepting personal responsibility for one's actions, the necessity of regeneration, the crucial role played by self-sacrificing love in regeneration, and the achievement of a new plane of existence characterized by more vital human relationships. Although there is no credo, the patterns of Callaghan's novels are profoundly Christian.

LE MONOLOGUE QUEBECOIS

Laurent Mailhot

L'homme ne disait rien. Ce que nous nommons monologues sont des dialogues avec quelque part ignorée de nous-même — GILLES HENAULT

Le monologue idéal serait silencieux — YVON DESCHAMPS

LE MONOLOGUE est la forme la plus ancienne et la plus nouvelle du théâtre québécois (je ne dis pas de la scène canadienne ou canadienne-française). Il se situe à la fois en marge (au cabaret, dans les boîtes) et au coeur de notre théâtre. Des chansonniers aux dramaturges tous les hommes de la parole et du spectacle l'ont plus ou moins utilisé. Yvon Deschamps et Michel Tremblay l'ont rendu particulièrement significatif. Le monologue est peut-être, aujourd'hui comme au temps de Jean Narrache et de Fridolin, notre forme de théâtre la plus vraie, la plus spécifique, la plus populaire et la mieux engagée, la seule où puissent se retrouver ensemble travailleurs et chômeurs, intellectuels et bourgeois. Comment ? Et pourquoi ?

LE ROMAN nous avait habitués aux *voix* de Maria Chapdelaine, à la *folie* de Merraud, aux *jongleries* d'Alexandre Chênevert, au *vécrire* de Galarneau. Yves Thériault publiait des *Contes pour un homme seul*, Adrien Thério un *Soliloque en hommage à une femme*, Réal Benoit voulait *Quelqu'un pour m'écouter*, etc. Ces personnages sont maintenant sur la scène, sous les feux. Ils n'ont pas fini de ruminer et de se bercer (d'illusions), mais l'humour (rose

ou rouge, noir, corrosif ou grinçant) leur est venu en même temps que le geste et la parole.

Adolescents ou quadragénaires, vieilles filles ou matrones, ivrognes ou pédérastes, employés, manoeuvres ou intellectuels de gauche, ils sont plus que diverses facettes de l'homme québécois. Presque tous "en-dessous de la moyenne", comme Gratien Gélinas le disait de Fridolin, ils en dévoilent les dessous, le conditionnement psycho-sociologique. Voix sans visages d'un pays incertain, ils appellent, ils explorent, ils nomment. Le monologue est un moyen de dépasser (sans tout à fait en sortir) la *jonglerie* hivernale, le repliement méditatif sur soi. Le personnage est encore seul, mais il est seul avec d'autres, solitaire-solidaire, puisqu'il *jongle* devant un public, et qu'on découpe, on organise sa *jonglerie.* De *jongleux* mélancolique et sédentaire il est devenu jongleur: joueur, rieur en même temps que révolté et tragique.

La récente *Sagouine* acadienne d'Antonine Maillet, admirable excroissance ou rejeton naturel des *Crasseux,* est-elle une pièce, un discours, un récit? C'est un monologue "pour une femme seule" qui a trouvé son auditoire et sa mémoire:

> Ah ! c'est point aisé de te faire déporter coume ça, et de crouère que tu y laisseras queques plumes dans ta déportâtion. Ca se paye ces voyages là. C'est vrai que tu fais parler de toi après: ils te dounont toute sorte de façon de beaux noms, coume Evangéline et les saints martyrs canadiens. Ils t'appelont un peuple héroïque et martyr et ils te jouquont quasiment dans la niche de l'Ecce Homo (...) C'était une belle histouère, c't'elle-là à Marie-Stella pis Evangéline; ben moi j'aimais encore mieux les contes de mon défunt père.

Citoyenne d' "En-bas", fille et femme de pêcheurs, née "quasiment les pieds dans l'eau", un peu morue à l'occasion, la vieille femme de ménage a pour tout décor "son seau, son balai et ses torchons", comme Fridolin avait son chandail de hockey, sa fronde, sa chaise et sa casquette de travers. L'anti-Evangéline s'adresse "à son eau trouble", elle se décrasse après avoir décrotté tout le monde. La Sagouine, qui est à elle seule "un glossaire, une race, un envers de la médaille", un livre d'images et de *Jos Graphie,* est une marée montante à la frontière de l'observation et du rêve, du subconscient et de la lucidité. "La moman" et "La femme de 47 ans" de Jacqueline Barrette (*ça-dit-qu'essa-à-dire*) son des sagouines montréalaises, durcies et rongées par la mécanisation, la publicité, les *vues sexées*; plus gênées et plus gênantes parce que moins folkloriques: elles ne composent aucun tableau, aucun discours; elles se décomposent.

Si le monologuiste est un "raconteur bien ordonné qui commence par soi-même" (selon la formule de Jean-V. Dufresne), Yvon Deschamps est le mieux né et le mieux ordonné des conteurs. Il est né pauvre, *pogné*, imaginatif et un peu délinquant, typiquement montréalais, dans un quartier Saint-Henri qui évoque *Bonheur d'occasion* mais aussi le Plateau Mont-Royal de Michel Tremblay. "Mon personnage, c'est toute ma jeunesse. Et cette mentalité qui est mienne par moments. Ce sont des souvenirs du passé. Il faut que ce soit ça", dit-il dans une interview à Jean Royer. Il faut que ce soit ça au départ (*Dans ma cour*: "les seize portes s'ouvraient et les trente-deux bras se rabattaient sur les enfants"), un Deschamps refoulé at réapparu, mais aussi plus et moins que Deschamps.

Baptiste est l'ouvrier colonisé, aliéné, qui se repose et se complaît dans l'inconscience, l'asservissement, la servilité. Il se fait le domestique de son patron ("un bon *boss*"), allant jusqu'à tondre son gazon le dimanche et à accepter avec reconnaissance un verre de bière tiède. Niais, *niaiseux*, Baptiste l'est sans retenue; inspiré et bavard, il ira cependant au bout de son personnage, en découvrira les limites, les tares. Il est à l'origine d'un langage, d'un registre, d'un style, qui le traduisent tout entier, puis le trahissent, le dépassent, l'entraînent à se (re)définir. D'explication en explications, le personnage se noue et se délie, se déplie, se multiplie. Devant l'autorité, le travail, l'argent ou le bonheur, ses réactions sont attendues. Face à sa femme (morte) et à son petit, elles sont déjà plus ambiguës. Par rapport à la politique, aux mass-média, aux jeunes, à la nouvelle culture, le héros de Deschamps est nous tous, non seulement québécois mais américain, occidental. Par exemple dans *Nigger Black, Le Foetus, Cable TV*, sur la guerre et la vie, la racisme et les communications non-communicatives.

Les monologues de Deschamps naissent et se développent diversement, de l'observation aussi bien que de la mémoire, par l'écriture, le rythme, la musique. *Les Unions qu'ossa donne*, construit comme une chanson (six couplets qu'intercalent un refrain musical) fut d'abord un sketch où Gilbert Chénier jouait l'employé et Deschamps le patron; après deux semaines, on renverse les rôles et l'improvisation fonctionne le plus naturellement du monde, si bien que l'interprète se retrouve auteur d'un texte qu'il n'a jamais rédigé. Il n'a pas écrit une seule ligne non plus du long *Cable TV* ("un *gag*", au départ). *Les Anglais*, pourtant assez subtil, fut improvisé cinq minutes avant d'entrer en scène pour le spectacle *Poèmes et chants de la Résistance*. *Le Honte* a commencé par une dizaine de phrases, enrichies peu à peu des ânonnements et des âneries de cette bonne femme

(adepte des *hot lines* radiophoniques) qui trouve que les Canadiens français "i sont pas capa'd's'exprimer", et "quand i parlent, on les comprend pas". *Pépère* et *Le Foetus*, par contre, furent rédigés d'un jet et d'une façon définitive. En général, un monologue atteint sa taille et sa forme après cinq ou six mois de vie publique. Certains se présentent comme de la provocation directe, l'agression d'un public trop bien assis, trop gentiment disposé.

"Comme la poésie de Gilles Vigneault, la prose populaire d'Yvon Deschamps se développe toujours à partir d'elle-même, sans jamais se disperser; et, avec une rigueur fascinante à saisir le fouillis presque désespérant du paradoxe et de la contradiction (. . .) Deschamps a inventé la logique pas-d'allure, l'anti-vérité, le contre-mensonge".[1] Forçant la dose, il fait du poison un contrepoison, du somnifère un réveil. Utilisant les termes les plus à terre (une manifestation devient du "marchage en gang dans 'es rues"), un accent nasal, des évidences grossières, des contradictions apparentes et boiteuses — "Nous aut' on n'a jamais eu d'argent, mais ça nous a pas empêchés de travailler", où le lien causal est souligné par la coordination —, Deschamps les redresse et les fait parler. Ses pléonasmes sont délirants, ses onomatopées ont du sens, ses platitudes de l'épaisseur, ses piétinements du mouvement. Il rend audibles, presque tangibles, l'absurdité et l'absurde. *S'tessdrardinaire* ! Au Père qui demande, d'une voix mal endimanchée: "Les petits gars, si on arait de l'argent, que ferions-nous-tu avec", l'enfant répond, imperturbable: "Peut-être que pourrions-nous-tu nous acheter une machine avec" (*L'Argent*).Remarquons enfin que le Bonheur et divers Proverbes ou Dictons se promènent en chair et en os, comme des vieillards fantomatiques, radoteurs, dans les monologues de Deschamps (*Le Petit Jésus* les assimile aux grands-prêtres). La personnification de l'abstrait est ici dénonciation des clichés, de la routine verbale impersonnelle.

On est pogné mais . . . ON VA S'EN SORTIR, ce titre déjà long et apparemment clair, Deschamps l'explique ou l'explicite ainsi: "On va aller se pogner dans autre chose, mais on n'a pas le choix. Et puis après, on recommencera à s'en sortir".[2] Il n'y a d'issue et même de fait irréfutable pour personne sinon la mort, "épanouissement total de la vie", dira-t-il ailleurs. Il n'y a que des issues partielles, portes qui ouvrent sur d'autres murs et d'autres portes: l'indépendance du Québec en est une à ses yeux, comme la libération sexuelle, la syndicalisation, la tolérance, etc.

FRANCOIS HERTEL, qui fustigera plus tard le misérabilisme de Marie-Claire Blais et du groupe de *Parti pris*, se plaignait après *Tit-Coq* dans des termes analogues à ceux de Victor Barbeau, fondateur de l'Académie canadienne-française: "Notre culture est désespérément peuple!" et, ajoutait-il, "si passionnée!" Selon lui, on peut assister à des "vaudevilles" comme ceux de Gélinas (l'aurait-il dit de *Bousille*, sa meilleure pièce?) dans "n'importe quel cabaret parisien comme les Deux-Anes ou le Théâtre de Dix-Heures". Gérard Pelletier,[3] qui rapporte ces propos de l'exilé, demande au critique de "faire la différence entre les blagues à fleur de peau des chansonniers montmartrois et le caractère profondément humain des sketches de Fridolin". De même, le spectateur doit aujourd'hui distinguer entre des imitateurs ou chansonniers (au sens parisien) comme Jacques Normand ou Claude Landré, les Jérolas ou les Cyniques, qui s'engagent dans l'actualité la plus immédiate, et des auteurs-compositeurs comme Gilles Vigneault ou Georges Dor qui, à côté de leurs chansons, ont développé avec bonheur des monologues souvent très proches du théâtre. Ceux-là sont des caricaturistes ou des journalistes; ceux-ci sont presque des écrivains. Ils ont créé des types, des mythes, un ton. Leur *voix* est ailleurs que dans leurs cordes vocales; leur musique est dans le langage.

On pourrait encore citer des poètes, tels Miron, Chamberland, Péloquin, Duguay, Michèle Lalonde ou Michel Garneau, comme exemples de cette littérature orale et prophétique. *La Nuit de la poésie* n'était pas toujours poétique, mais elle était toujours théâtrale ou dramatique. Elle était le monologue à plusieurs voix d'un peuple[4] qui cherche à se reconnaître pour s'unir. Du libre et disparate *Show de vot' vie* (par la Quenouille bleue à la discothèque "Chez Dieu") au *Show de la parole* où Péloquin fait reculer la mort, où Duguay fait vibrer à l'unisson, jusqu'au "boutte", jusqu'au "Toutte", la syllabe sacrée: Ommmmmmmmmm . . . — d'un *show* à l'autre (et depuis *L'Osstidcho* de Charlebois, Forestier et Deschamps), chansons, jeux, monologues, parole et (du moins chez Duguay) silence s'intercalent et s'interpénètrent.

> J'ouvre la porte, rien.
> Je ferme la porte, rien.
> J'ouvre la porte, rien que moi-même,

gratte, frappe et joue Robert Charlebois (*Margot*).

> Car comment voulez-vous parler, chanter ou rire,
> C'que vous voudrez,

Car comment voulez-vous c'que vous voudrez
Quand la vie s'en est allée sans vous en parler . . . (*Le Mont Athos*)

Les "expressions occultes" du *Zirmate* de Péloquin, l'infonique ou infoniaque *Lapocalipso* de Duguay (infonie = "symphonie de l'infini"), *Sur fil métamorphose* ou *Les Oranges sont vertes*, de Gauvreau, sont-ils poèmes ou spectacles? Et les "Monologues de l'aliénation délirante" de Miron? Françoise Loranger cite justement ce poème en postface à *Médium saignant*[5] — à moins que ce ne soit en préface à cette pièce "avec un seul personnage." ("une âme aussi nue que possible"), qu'elle rêvait d'écrire après deux pièces "collectives":

. . . moi je gis muré dans la boîte crânienne
dépoétisé dans ma langue et mon appartenance
déphasé et décentré dans ma coincidence
ravageur je fouille ma mémoire et mes chairs
jusqu'en les maladies de la tourbe et de l'être
pour trouver la trace de mes signes arrachés emportés
pour reconnaître mon cri dans l'opacité du réel . . .

Le monologue, qu'il soit poétique, comique ou dramatique, est toujours "dépoétisé", "déphasé et décentré". Il est un mur sondé, un sol fouillé, ravagé, un cri sourd ou perçant, une blessure qui voudrait guérir sans se cicatriser.

Quand j'parl'tout seul (6000 exemplaires vendus) ou *J'parl' pour parler*, écrivait durant la Crise des années 30 Jean Narrache (pseudonyme transparent d'Emile Coderre). "J'écris pour être parlé" est le titre plus dynamique, déjà théâtral, d'un poème de jeunesse de Dubé:

J'écris pour être parlé
Et pour qu'il soit possible
à mon frère inconnu
D'entendre couler mes larmes
et ma joie se débattre
Entre les quatre grilles des prisons
de mon rêve".[6]

Dire pour ne pas être dit, préfère pour sa part Gilles Derome (c'est le titre-poème de son recueil), auteur d'un *Qui est Dupressin?* qui fut, en 1962, après celles de Languirand, la première pièce antidubéenne, anti-psychologique et anti-réaliste, du théâtre québécois. Dans tous les cas il s'agit cependant d'un écart entre dire et parler, entre écouter et entendre, entre écrire et créer:

on n'ouvre pas les yeux sans tuer quelque mystère
bénéficiant en silence
de notre contumace,

déclare Gérald Godin dans son "Cantouque français dit du temps nouveau". Voir n'est pas regarder, n'est pas savoir. D'un oeil, d'une oreille, d'une bouche à l'autre, il y a un sous-entendu, un malentendu, un inter-dit et un interdit.

LE MONOLOGUE joue un rôle important dans le théâtre proprement dit: dans les pièces de forme conventionnelle ou traditionnelle, davantage encore dans les structures éclatées du nouveau théâtre. Et je pense moins ici aux longues tirades, morceaux de bravoure ou professions de foi, qu'il est facile de repérer un peu partout, qu'à des recherches et expressions de soi totales, comme les confessions à la fois personnelles et historiques de la matriarche du *Temps sauvage*, de la Mère du *Marcheur*, de Jean à la fin *d'Un fils à tuer*, de *Brutus* enfin où on a l'impression que "les personnages se parlent non point pour se comprendre mais pour s'expliquer; et non point pour s'expliquer à l'autre, mais à soi".[7]

Les drames réalistes de Dubé font une place de choix à l'oraison funèbre et amoureuse (*Zone*), à l'autoportrait des parvenus (*Bilan*) au plaidoyer quasi-judiciaire (*Au retour des oies blanches*), à l'allocution inconsciemment autocritique des séparatistes de salon (celui des *Beaux Dimanches* est célèbre). Plus significative est la courbe descendante que dessinent les dialogues des protagonistes : "l'échange verbal s'achève presque immanquablement en supplication, en aveu d'impuissance ou en cri de désespoir".[8] La structure des pièces de Dubé est parallèle, symétrique: elle est d'ailleurs fondée sur le couple, aussi bien dans le cycle populaire que dans le cycle bourgeois de l'oeuvre. Les figures, le style sont ceux de l'inventaire, de la répétition, de la reprise, du "cercle qu'il faut rompre après en avoir fait le tour pour qu'il cesse d'être le tombeau, la cage et le vaisseau où les générations précédentes se sont trouvées emprisonnées".[9]

La majeure partie ce de qu'on appelle le théâtre québécois n'est au fond que des monologues esquissés, esquivés, ou encore développés mais juxtaposés. Si l'intrigue (là où on en veut) est souvent lâche, le dénouement arbitraire, les dialogues maladroits et artificiels, les monologues, eux, sont le plus souvent réussis. C'est le cas non seulement de *Bien à moi, marquise* (Marie Savard), de *La Duchesse de Langeais*, de *La Sagouine*, de *Solange* (Jean Barbeau) ou du

Pierre Sigouin de Jacques Hébert, pièces à un seul personnage, mais des *Grands Départs* et des *Violons de l'automne*, d'*Encore cinq minutes* et d'*Un Cri qui vient de loin*, pièces élaborées à partir d'un ou de plusieurs monologues différés, entrecoupés, morcelés.

Ces déménagements sur place, ces transports interrompus, ces plaintes, ces espoirs, cette protestation, cette revendication, cette douleur complaisamment ou courageusement étalée, ces cris qui viennent de l'enfance, ces familles *en pièces détachées* (suivant le titre de Tremblay), ces femmes et ces hommes qui essaient de se donner un nom, un visage, ce sont des monologues en situation et en action. Leur désordre même répond à une nécessité, obéit à des lois. Le *joual* par exemple, le sacre, le blasphème, les gestes manqués, le travestissement (des sexes, des âges, des conditions sociales, des sentiments), l'auto-destruction par l'alcool, le suicide, la prostitution, l'exil. "On ne peut dire le mal, le pourrissement, l'écoeurement dans un langage serein, correct; il faut que mes paroles soient ébranlées dans leur fondement même, par le destructuration qui est celle du langage commun, de la vie de tous".[10]

Il devient de plus en plus évident, à mesure que ses pièces sont créées, que la production de Michel Tremblay n'est pas due au hasard ou au miracle. Des *Belles-soeurs à Marie-Lou* une unité et une progression organiques s'imposent au spectateur et au lecteur. Le théâtre de Tremblay a des principes de construction solides et précis: non pas d'abord le *joual*, le personnage féminin ou le cadre montréalais (cuisine, taverne, club), mais cette forme (thème et structure) qu'est le monologue. Lorsqu'il évoque les influences qui l'ont marqué, Tremblay mentionne Gélinas, Dubé, les choeurs grecs, Beckett, "le plus grand", et, inattendu, Shakespeare, "à cause de mon grand amour pour les monologues qui n'en finissent plus." [11] La Duchesse de Langeais, "plus femme que toutes les femmes!", commère, vaniteuse, perverse, masochiste, "une grande artiste" dans son genre, n'en finit plus d'imiter et de s'imiter, de faire du théâtre dans le théâtre et des oeillades, des apartés dans le monologue. La Berthe des *Trois petits tours* sait qu'elle ne sortira jamais de sa cage de verre de caissière. Le "Showtime! Showtime!" du *doorman* (au "Coconut Inn") n'est pas pour elle, mais elle tient, sans illusion, à ce qu'on lui laisse ses illusions: "Qu'on me sacre la paix, pis qu'on me laisse rêver! C'est tout ce qui me reste!" Cela, elle le fait très bien, se donnant le réplique avec une verve triste, consciente de son retard et de ses limites, et pourtant capable de s'inventer "une vraie vie de vraie Star d'Hollywood!" Dans *A toi pour toujours, ta Marie-Lou*, dédicace effacée d'une photo jaunie, le quatuor

est divisé par couples: le père et la mère, l'un devant ses bouteilles de bière vides, l'autre son tricot sur les genoux; les deux filles, la célibataire casanière et la chanteuse *western* soi-disant émancipée. Tous sont immobiles dans leur espace respectif (sauf cette dernière, Carmen) et fixés (au sens psychanalytique) sur une époque et des événements passés. Cadavres en sursis qui racontent, préparent et (re)vivent au ralenti leur mort. Manon répète sa mère, Carmen reprend le geste désespéré de son père: l'anéantissement du noyau familial (un accident-suicide emporte Léopold, Marie-Louise et l'enfant qu'elle portait).

Le phénomène est particulièrement visible dans les spectacles les plus récents, qu'il s'agisse de revues improvisées et éphémères comme *Finies les folies!* (contre le projet de loi 63) ou *Hello Police*, de créations (plus ou moins) collectives comme celles du Théâtre du Même Nom et du Grand Cirque Ordinaire, ou de pièces proprement dites, lues au Centre d'essai des Auteurs dramatiques: *Dimi*, de Marc-F. Gélinas, *Les Pigeons d'Arlequin*, de Michel Gréco, "western intérieur", "théâtre de la lucidité sur soi-même, théâtre d'introspection", *Triangle à une voix* ou ce *Geste parlé,* d'André Caron, qui présente son oeuvre comme "l'art de ne pas dire ce qu'on a à dire et prendre quarante millions de détours pour y arriver". *Wouf Wouf* aussi, la machinerie-revue de Sauvageau, est un monologue intérieur traduit en parodies, en parades, en numéros de cirque, peuplé de rêves concrets, d'actions simultanées et contradictoires, parcouru surtout par un intense désir et des besoins élémentaires: la faim, la soif, l'envie d'aller pisser et de lancer, libre comme l'air, le cri de Tarzan: "Haaaaaaaaaaaaa . . . ! ! !"

Nos monologues sont très proches des bulles et du trait des bandes dessinées, où l'important est ce qui est absent, suggéré, et que le spectateur ajoute, imagine, comme le reconnaît Deschamps. Jean Barbeau est l'auteur de *Solange*, confession d'une ex-religieuse, d'un *Goglu* immobile et masturbatoire, et d'autre part des quatorze stations au poste de police d'un *Chemin de Lacroix*[12] laïcisé, et d'un *Ben-Ur* (*Be*noît-*Ur*bain Théberge) qui passe de l'album de famille à *Zorro*, *The Lone Ranger*, etc. "C'est de valeur que tous ces héros-là soient américains . . . Pas que j'en ai contre les Américains, mais . . . il me semble que ce serait plus l'fun si . . . si on avait les nôtres, nos héros . . ." [13] En attendant qu'on se décide entre Dollard des Ormeaux et Chénier, Ben-Ur collectionne les joueurs de hockey et est bien content de jouer du revolver dans un uniforme gris-bleu d'agent de la *Brook's* ("Sécurité depuis 1867 . . .").

"NOTRE THÉÂTRE, dans sa forme la plus spontanée, ressemble à une soirée de famille", observait Jean-Claude Germain, dont l'équipe, le T.M.N., produisit un *Diguidi, diguidi, ha! ha! ha!* où la "sainte trinité québécoise", *son* père, *sa* mère et *son* fils, est amenée à quitter sa chaise et à marcher à quatre pattes. Avant et jusque dans l'obscurité finale, la Mère prononce: "Je veux plus avoir pitié de personne ... je suis tannée de passer ma vie à m'excuser ... Je sais pas pourquoi je parle mais y faut que je continue (...) Je veux être libre tout court ... je veux être liiiiibbbrrreeee ... je veux être libre de le dire sans avoir à le crier ..." *Laver son linge sale* (en famille) était d'ailleurs le titre d'un montage de scènes choisies par André Brassard, et qui allaient d'Henry Deyglun au T.M.N. Même dans un radiothéâtre aussi symboliste que *Les Invités au procès*, d'Anne Hébert, l'homme qui, "pour s'être réservé un seul petit placard pour son linge sale, se croit à l'abri de la crasse pour le restant de ses jours", devra admettre qu'on lave son linge sale en famille. "La Fête de Fridolin", un des meilleurs sketches sur le titi montréalais, se terminait par le rappel hygiénico-moral de la mère à son fils: "Fridolin, c'est samedi à soir ... Ca fait qu'avant de te coucher, donne ton coeur au Bon Dieu, puis jette ton corps au linge sale". *Corps* voulait dire maillot de corps, mais l'ambiguïté est savoureuse.

Une soirée de famille, c'est toujours un remue-ménage, un lavage de têtes et de sous-vêtements, un *brassage* du refoulé qu'on refoule encore. Ce sont des épanchements et des confidences, des retraites et des agressions, de longs silences brutalement rompus, des incompréhensions et des discours parallèles. Peu de véritables dialogues, conversations et discussions. On défend moins un point de vue qu'on ne se défend soi-même, globalement. Les affirmations sont des affirmations de soi. On raconte des histoires et on raconte son histoire. Avec attendrissement et fureur, gêne et sans-gêne, de façon aussi drôle que pathétique.

Faut-il rattacher cette façon de faire (ou de se représenter) à une tradition orale particulièrement riche, reprise dans le domaine du conte par un Ferron, un Thériault, un Carrier? Sans doute, mais cette tradition elle-même doit être reliée à certains aspects de notre géographie et de notre histoire: l'isolement des rangs et des fermes, la rigueur de l'hiver, la longueur des voyages, l'exil saisonnier des forestiers, etc. Les temps faibles et monotones étaient ici brusquement coupés par des temps forts, des fêtes, aussi rares que violents. La parole éclatait soudain après des jours, des mois de solitude et de silence. A ce propos, la mise en scène de *La Guerre, yes sir!*, de Carrier, contrairement à ce qu'ont noté des chroniqueurs, paraît tout à fait appropriée à la pièce et à la tradition. Cette

alternance, voire cette coexistence sur le plateau d'une toile grisâtre, d'un espace vide, démesuré (à la Lemieux), et d'autre part de scènes intérieures débordante de vie, de couleurs, de mangeaille et de passions (un Massicotte brueghelisé), rend très bien compte de ce double rythme: ralenti jusqu'à l'immobilité, accéléré jusqu'au tourbillon.

Nous pouvons passer sans transition de la guerre de la Conquête à la soumission, de la résistance passive à la Révolte de 1837-38, de la Confédération parlementaire aux plébiscites anti-conscriptionnistes, du duplessisme à cette réforme agitée qu'on a appelée la Révolution tranquille ou *The Not So Quiet Revolution,* comme du jeûne à l'ivresse, du cléricalisme à l'indifférence religieuse, de la glace au soleil. "Faire la révolution, c'est sortir du dialogue dominé-dominateur; à proprement parler, c'est divaguer. Le terroriste parle tout seul", explique Hubert Aquin; "au théâtre ne doivent monologuer que les personnages qui hésitent indéfiniment, qui se trouvent aux prises avec la solitude déformante du révolutionnaire ou de l'aliéné. Il n'y a de monologues vrais que dans l'incohérence. L'incohérence dont je parle ici est une des modalités de la révolution, autant que le monologue en constitue le signe immanquable".[14]

Le monologue est par excellence l'aire et l'art de l'anti-héros, du sous-personnage, de l'individu émietté et perdu. Ses parcelles d'humanité sont d'autant plus émouvantes qu'elles sont dérisoires.[15] Ne cherchant pas à nous en imposer, la voix des monologues, cassée, rugueuse, répétitive et toujours chaude, s'impose à elle-même, se découvre une histoire, parfois un corps (pour la souffrance) et un visage (pour le rire). "J'ai l'impression que toutes les grandes tragédies québécoises vont être drôles (...), comme si notre plus grand malheur était arrivé en 1763 et que plus rien de pire ne peut maintenant arriver. Ca ne va peut-être pas si mal. Et c'est peut-être comme ça qu'on est universel. *Notre douleur voit grand.* On n'est pas tout seuls. On en voit d'autres qui sont mal pris," déclare Jean Barbeau dans la préface à son *Chemin de Lacroix.* "Bonheur, viens-t'en, viens-t-en vite, parce que moi je m'en vas! ...", criait Deschamps à la fin de son monologue le plus naïvement tragique. Qui est menacé de disparaître? L'homme et son milieu, sa collectivité (sa nation) indissociablement.

Le monologue est toujours la voix de plusieurs en un seul, le silence de tous en chacun. Il est délesté et lourd, fragile et tenace, sorte de mémoire du futur au passé, ou d'imagination à partir d'un réel invraisemblable. Le monologue est

tout entier présent et actuel, parole ou silence irrécusables, mais il déporte constamment l'attention vers ce qui aurait pu ne pas être, vers ce qui pourrait être autrement. Interrogation, exclamation ou points de suspension, il ne connaît pas le mot FIN. Noeud sans dénouement, sa structure est l'attente, le recommencement (donc l'espoir), même si son thème est la fatalité, l'impuissance, l'emprisonnement, l'angoisse. Le monologue québécois vit de ces contradictions entre la forme et le fond, l'instinct et la conscience, le quotidien et l'événement. Est-il destin ou libération? Il se nourrit du théâtre et de l'histoire (et il les nourrit) en attendant que ceux-ci, pour un temps, le remplacent.

NOTES

[1] Jean-V. Dufresne, "Deschamps quatre", dans *Actualité sur scène,* programme du spectacle de l'automne 1970 à la Place des Arts. — Voir, du même auteur, *Yvon Deschamps*, Montréal, Les Presses de l'Université du Québec, "Studio", 1971.

[2] Programme du spectacle. Supplément de *Québec-Presse,* 6 février 1972, p. 3. — *On n'est pas sorti du bois* est le titre d'une comédie musicale distanciée, exorcisante, critique, de Dominique de Pasquale (Montréal, Leméac, "Répertoire québécois", 1972). Gilbert David note dans sa présentation: "Le Théâtre "québécois" n'en finit pas d'achever le Canadien Français: c'est un meurtre légitime qui ressemble à un suicide" (p. 7). "Avec les sauvages, c'est le cri de guerre que je vais lancer", dit Pet-le-feu, un des trois personnages trop blancs, trop pâles de *Lendemain d'la veille,* monologues d'Odette Gagnon.

[3] "Culture peuple", *Le Devoir,* 12 février 1949, p. 9.

[4] Gérald Godin disait, à propos de la tournée "engagée" de Mouloudji (célébrant le Paris de 1870) et des *Poèmes et chants de la Résistance II* (après nos "événements d'octobre") : la différence c'est que notre Commune nous la vivons actuellement.

[5] Montréal, Leméac, "Théâtre canadien", 1970 — La critique du *Montreal Star* voyait d'ailleurs *Médium saignant* comme une non-pièce, un non-spectacle, "*a prolonged cry of frustrated rage*", "*an exorcism of fear and a litany of hate*". "Si vous ne pouvez pas parler, criez!", conclut Loranger (p. 139).

[6] Marcel Dubé, *Textes et documents,* Montréal, Leméac, "Théâtre canadien D-I", 1968, p. 14.

[7] Jean Ethier-Blais, "Le *Théâtre* de Paul Toupin, *Le Devoir,* 16 décembre 1961, p. 12.

[8] Maximilien Laroche, *Marcel Dubé,* Montréal, Fides, "Ecrivains canadiens d'aujourd'hui" 1970, p. 100.

[9] *Ibid.,* p. 112.

[10] Paul Chamberland, "Dire ce que je suis", *Parti pris,* vol. III, no. 5, janvier 1965, p. 36.

[11] "Entrevue avec Michel Tremblay", *Nord,* vol. I, no. 1, automne 1971, p. 69.

[12] "Ca parle, la majorité silencieuse (...) Ca parle mal, ça parle pas fort, ça parle pas directement aux autres, mais ça parle ... Si vous alliez dans les endroits où ça se ramasse, vous entendriez..." (*Le Chemin de Lacroix* suivi de *Goglu*, Montréal, Leméac, "Répertoire québécois", 1971, p. 49).

[13] *Ben-Ur*, Montréal, Leméac, "Répertoire québécois", 1971, p. 98. — Albert Millaire, directeur du Thèâtre Populaire du Québec, rappelle le principal élément de sa mise en scène: "Nous avons assis le personnage de Ben à l'avant-scène, nous lui avons donné un carton plein de *comics*, nous lui avons réservé un bon projecteur, et c'est là que s'est engagé le grand monologue du début de la deuxième partie. *Ce grand monologue a été mis en pièces et nous nous en sommes servi au début et tout au long de la représentation*" (*Ibid.*, p. 5-6. C'est moi qui souligne).

[14] "Profession: écrivain", *Parti pris*, vol. I, no. 4, janvier 1964, p. 27.

[15] Récemment, chez *Sol* (Seul), doux et auguste clown de Marc Faureau.

A. G. Bailey "Into the flooding tide
to seek the consolation of the waters,
to find the depths a life of blessed peace
after the sable ride."

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FATHERS AND SONS

Marilyn J. Davis

A RECENT ARTICLE by Ronald Sutherland, "The Calvinist-Jansenist Pantomime,"[1] compares English- and French-Canadian literatures as reflectors of Puritanical repression in Canadian society. Sutherland argues that Canada remained

> more faithful to the Puritan ethos than has the United States of America. And what is even more significant, Canadian Puritanism has evolved much the same form of expression in Protestant English Canada as in Roman Catholic Quebec.

English-Canadian Calvinism shares a common denominator with the Jansenism of French-Canadian Catholicism. The root of both is Augustinian theology as interpreted by Calvin, and by Jansen after him. "In its doctrine of hereditary corruption, universal deprivation, and complete loss of spiritual freedom on the part of man," says one authoritative source, "Calvin takes over almost unchanged the doctrine of Augustine."[2] Similarly, says another, "Jansen adopted in their entirety the most rigid of St. Augustine's formulas, and adhered especially . . . to the most rigid [gratuitous predestination]. . . . " In treating of the Fall of man Jansen assumed "a very pessimistic standpoint in which he presented as absolute the power of concupiscence over free will, thenceforth inclined to sin."[3]

The doctrine of predestination affirmed by Calvin and Jansen raised thorny problems of divine grace for orthodox theologians. Given the total depravity of man since the Fall — not only in his spiritual nature but also in his human powers of intellection and will — then "all man's works are contaminated by sin" (*NCE*, II, 1092), and human activity is impotent to establish a proper relationship with god. It is an image of man corrupted into a "horrible deformity,"[4] as Calvin put it. Salvation then, is *absolutely* in the divine will and *not at all* in man's merits and good works, for predestination either to election or reprobation is presented as independent of God's foreknowledge of individual merit.

Those foreordained to eternal damnation are justly treated since *all* men are wholly perverted. Those foreordained to eternal life acquire it only because "God's grace is irresistible. Just as sinful man *necessarily* wills evil, so the elected or justified man *necessarily* conforms to God's decree" (*NCE*, II, 1092). Spiritually speaking, man is abased to *nothing*.

The invincible logic of Calvin's doctrine may be partly attributed to his rigorous training in logic and law, and to a tendency to see God "in terms of his supreme power that is absolute law ... " (*NCE*, II, 1090). Thus, "justice, in some sense, may be vindicated on the lines of Augustine and Calvin, but not *love*; for if God could save, why did he not?" (*ERE*, III, 152). Jansen's work was "immediately accused of renewing the errors of ... Calvin" (*NCE*, VII, 820), and condemned. In 1730, following political persecutions, the anti-Jansenism bull *Unigenitus* (1713) was proclaimed law in France. Subsequently, Jansenism moved underground and became "entrenched in the mentality of a minority clan, narrow, surly, and irritable ... " (*NCE*, VII, 824). Signs of a "martyr mentality" emerged, frequently accompanied by an "eschatological mentality" which conceived the end of the world near at hand (*NCE*, VII, 824). Calvinist theology triumphed mainly in Scotland, Jansenism in France, the two cultures which most significantly contributed to the early growth of Canada.

HUGH MACLENNAN indicates, in his essays, his awareness of the peculiar influence of religion on the Canadian psyche:

> In addition to the repressions enforced by nature, there are few nations in which established religion has had a greater success in curbing exuberance. The authority of the Quebec priest over his parish is famous. In the English-speaking provinces Calvinism has been endemic from the beginning.[5]

And although MacLennan has not to my knowledge specifically pointed out the Augustinian root to both Jansenism and Calvinism, he is certainly aware of its dual heritage in Christian life:

> From St. Augustine we accepted the vision of the City of God, and mankind has been better as a result. Also from St. Augustine the Christian religion accepted for centuries the view that man, though God's creature, is utterly vile, and failed to realize that this opinion was the purely personal result of St. Augustine's disgust with his own former life of debauchery and sensuality.[6]

To examine doctrinal similarities is inadequate, however, since both systems assumed different shapes in different countries, under new conditions, without abandoning their fundamental principles. When the Scottish Church adopted the Westminster Confession (1646), for example, it passed from Genevan-Calvinism to the Puritan pattern.[7] In fact, Puritan Covenant theology modified Calvinism since Puritans made "God's absolutism tractable to man's ability to conform," so that now:

> man's duty was to fulfill his contract with God. Since God had made the contract in the image of legal and trade agreements of the time, His demands were reasonable and humanly possible of fulfillment. Thus, Calvin's God of predestination and irresistible condemnation became a Puritan God who could be served by righteous living and who would thereby consider those so living among the elect. (*NCE*, II, 1093-94.)

The continued emphasis on original sin and human depravity made mortification of flesh in the Old Adam one of the central duties of Christian life, and lent to Puritan devotion a sombre and gloomy character.

"Often I have said to myself that my grandfathers three times removed lived in a culture as primitive as Homer's," said MacLennan. And indeed the environmental harshness of the Scottish Highlands was peculiarly suited to the growth of Calvinism. When they emigrated to the Canadian Maritimes "with them they brought — no doubt of this — that nameless haunting guilt they never understood. . . . "[8] It was reinforced in an austere land with a harshness of its own,

> a part of Canada where nobody is able to change the landscape. Along the Atlantic coast of Nova Scotia you grow up with the conviction that everything in nature here is as it is forever, and that man, living with the shifting immutability of the ocean and the unshifting immutability of granite rocks, can never dominate his own fate. . . .[9]

In *Each Man's Son*, Dr. Ainslie well knows "there was a rock in them all, buried deep in the past of his own race."

IT IS THE PURITANICAL EFFECTS of both Calvinism and Jansenism that MacLennan presents as significantly determining the relation between fathers and sons in two novels which are filially connected: *Each Man's Son* (1951) and *The Return of the Sphinx* (1967). In *Each Man's Son*, MacLennan focuses on a father/son situation to present his theme of Calvinist guilt

which haunts an entire Scottish, Cape Breton community like a doom. In his "Author's Note" to the first edition MacLennan refers to the "ancient curse, intensified by John Calvin and branded upon their souls by John Knox and his successors — the belief that man has inherited from Adam a nature so sinful that there is no hope for him and that, furthermore, he lives and dies under the wrath of an arbitrary God who will forgive only a handful of his elect on the Day of Judgment."[10] George Woodcock describes this "sickness" which MacLennan sees, "as the principal internal enemy of our western civilization".[11] The result is a society too sub-consciously guilt-ridden to live fully or love well.

The theme arises early in the novel when Dougald MacKenzie, wise man and father-figure to Dr. Daniel Ainslie, bluntly asserts: "You haven't forgotten a single word you've ever heard from your own Presbyterian father. You may think you've rejected religion with your mind, but your personality has no more rejected it than dyed cloth rejects its original colour." MacKenzie continues quietly in an ironic parody of Calvin's pessimistic sense of sin, then he again addresses Dr. Ainslie. "I'm a Christian, Dan, but Calvin wasn't one and neither was your father. It may sound ridiculous to say, in cold words, that you feel guilty merely because you're alive, but that's what you were taught to believe until you grew up."

MacKenzie's words set Ainslie brooding about this "burden of guilt" passed from father to son, in the following way:

> But why must he, Daniel Ainslie, forever feel guilty before he could reason away any cause for guilt? . . . MacKenzie had told him that although he might be an intellectual agnostic, he was an emotional child in thrall to his barbarous Presbyterian past. As he thought this, he felt guilty again. But why? Was there no end to the circle of Original Sin? Could a man never grow up and be free? It was deeper than theory and more personal. There was Margaret — he felt guilty before her, guilty in his soul. Why again? Merely because, when he had married her, he had been so swayed by sexual desire? As he thought this he saw her anew, as he had seen her for the first time, that wonderful, white firm body so eager for pleasure with him, himself desperate for the joy in her, yet at the same time half afraid and half ashamed. Why again? What was wrong with desire, except that within himself it was overpowering and he feared it? Why did he fear it, since she had always been able to satisfy it? Because he had been taught to fear it. Because it led hellward. But he was a physician, a learned man of forty-two years, and he no longer believed in hell and damnation. No, but he did believe, and believed because it was true, that he had permitted the fables of childhood to destroy much of Margaret's happiness. So the circle was complete again. Any way he regarded himself, he was guilty, and there was no way out.

So, "the curse of his ancestors" has been passed from father to son, and made Ainslie — against his will — a prisoner of his father's past, chained to his father's image of god-the-father seen as a harsh, Old Testament Jehovah, rather than as a New Testament god of love and mercy.

"Submission to God's will expressed itself in self-control" for "man's depravity necessitated a stern and repressive moral discipline" where unchastity, for example, was sin, not venial weakness. Also, where even children are "cursed creatures" because of original sin, distrust of child nature led to distrust of "natural feeling". Thus it is that Ainslie orients himself almost exclusively towards his brain in order to keep "emotional distance" from his wife, Margaret. Pleasure, for Ainslie, is medical work which relaxes "the tense muscles of his back". Yet his medical potentialities as a neurosurgeon are not realized, since to seek "success" is to the Calvinist mentality simultaneously a command and a sin. "The face of [Ainslie's] father flashed before his eyes. How could he ever hope to win the kind of struggle such a father bred into his son? The old Calvinist had preached that life was a constant struggle against evil, and his son had believed him. At the same time he had preached that failure was a sin. Now the man [Ainslie] who had been the boy must ask, How could a successful man be sinless, or a sinless man successful?"

Any dissipation of wealth and energy was "sternly denounced and repressed" in Puritanical Calvinism, "time and talents were not to be wasted. . . . Idleness was a sure sign that one's standing in grace was doubtful. No one should be unemployed." Ergo, Ainslie's few spare moments are filled with his translation of Homer's *Odyssey* without his awareness that he is on a strange pilgrimage himself. The study of Greek also keeps him apart from Margaret. Dougald MacKenzie diagnoses Ainslie's increasing irritability as the "hypertension" of a man who "courts unnecessary work" and who "flogs" himself into reading Homer. Pointedly MacKenzie adds, "no man can deliberately exclude his wife from the centre of his life and hope to escape the hounds." Then, more bluntly: "as long as you've been married to Margaret you've resented her because she hasn't been able to wash away your sense of sin."

Like MacKenzie, Margaret is sensitive to her husband's belief that to work as he did was senseless. "No wonder, she thought now, growing up with those wild, solemn, Bible-reading Highlanders all around him, looking out at the glory of an innocent world, Daniel had been unable to prevent a need growing in him, until now that need was higher than a mountain." Ainslie's need is for a son to "give purpose to the universe" and to be "the boy he might have been, the

future he can no longer attain." Having in the past performed a hysterectomy on his wife (which now compounds his guilt), Ainslie must look elsewhere for a "son," and arbitrarily decides young Alan MacNeil will fill the role. He arrogantly tramples over the loving kindness of Alan's mother, Mollie MacNeil, as he does over her absent husband Archie, who is a coarse man of brawn, not brain. Alan is a son "conceived" in Ainslie's intellect, destined to become a man of brain unlike his real father, and freed from "everything in his background that would try to hold him down." This is arbitrary social justice devoid of love. Significantly Ainslie's awareness of the "sonship" of Alan occurs when after a successful brain operation he took young Alan on an educational trip to Louisburg. With a sense of Calvinist predestination Ainslie feels that this "had not been an accident."

The wise-man, Dougald MacKenzie, is again the bearer of truth to Ainslie when he speaks of the primary importance of a loving person above all else in the world. MacKenzie knocks the bottom out of Ainslie's illusion that his mother was to be condemned as a weakling and his father revered as an archetypal, strong-willed Presbyterian. Ainslie describes the hardship of his boyhood and proudly says: "all of us [are] well-educated, thanks to my father. Mother thought it was more important for us to eat than to learn. She had none of his will power." In Ainslie's Calvinist eyes she wrongly placed the carnal above the intellectual. MacKenzie sets Ainslie straight in no uncertain terms. It was only his "father's driving ambition," he says, which "forced his whole family to go hungry." All this time, adds MacKenzie, Ainslie's mother unobtrusively gave her portion of food to her children to keep them healthy. She died from malnutrition, after Ainslie's father curtly dismissed MacKenzie as her doctor after the latter blamed Ainslie's father for her condition. "I wouldn't talk about her lack of will power if I were you. . . . You would do well to honour your father less and your mother more. She was a very loving woman."

The father image which had formed the cornerstone of Ainslie's life briefly merges with his memory of "the expression in Mollie's eyes as she comforted Alan. Then . . . Mollie's eyes . . . were the eyes of his own mother." As MacLennan puts it, "the little boy he once had been still longed to be loved by some human being as Alan was loved by her." At this point, MacKenzie states a deeper truth, the significance of which, Ainslie is not yet able to grasp: "You aren't looking for a son, Dan. You're looking for a God." As Peter Buitenhuis puts it:

> Dr. Dougald's story suggests that Ainslie has suppressed the normal love for his mother and fixated his affections on his father instead. This appears to be why he has such a strong urge to be a father himself. He has pushed Mollie and her maternal rights into the background as a form of revenge for his mother's supposed betrayal. He has also been unable to relate emotionally to his own wife, Margaret, because of his crippling emotional negation. In the gap left by his loss of religious belief, he had placed the ideal of fatherhood.[12]

But Ainslie's stubborn mind fiercely rejects the wisdom of the old man's truth. Mollie he sees as merely "a good woman . . . and Alan deserves far better than that. . . . nothing is going to stop me. Nothing." Ainslie's choice ultimately precipitates the catastrophe that emerges from a tangle of guilty relationships. "If God looked down on them that summer," says MacLennan, "the kind of God their ministers had told them about, He must have been well pleased, for by summer's end all of them except Alan were conscious of their sins," and the Calvinistic sense of doom hangs over what George Woodcock describes as this "little society [which is] bound together by a common faith in its own damnation."[13]

The brutal catastrophe, however, does not occur until Ainslie releases his grip on Alan with a sense of gratuitous love, and frees himself from the burden of his father's harsh Old Testament God whom he now sees as "nothing but the invention of mad theologians" and a "fear" that had

> hobbled his spirit. The fear of [this] curse had led directly to a fear of love itself. They were criminals, the men who invented [this] curse and inflicted it upon him, but they were all dead. There was no one to strike down for generations of cramped and ruined lives. The criminals slept well, and their names were sanctified.

Now Ainslie experiences the loss of Alan as the loss of God, since both are a loss of something larger than his own life. Ainslie's despair is a form of spiritual death manifested as total negation. Ainslie sees only "a world without purpose, without meaning, without intelligence; dependent upon nothing, out of nothing, within nothing; moving into an eternity which itself was nothing." In this condition of "total emptiness" in which Ainslie "had reached his core" and "stopped" he acquires "the freedom of not caring," and "in that moment he made the discovery that he was ready to go on with life," and that "now he could once more think about the people around him."

Freed now from Puritanical fear, Ainslie looks upon Alan snuggled protectively in Margaret's arms. "It was then that Ainslie began to cry. . . . It was the

first time Margaret had ever known him to be unashamed of showing emotion." Release from the shackles of Puritanism is like a classical purgation. The novel ends with Ainslie talking to MacKenzie in the realization that he has acted "through arrogance.... Through total incapacity to understand that in comparison with a loving human being, everything else is worthless."

THE RETURN OF THE SPHINX evokes the father/son relationship between the middle-aged Alan Ainslie (Alan MacNeil of *Each Man's Son*) and his twenty year old son Daniel, named after Alan's adoptive father. In the 1960's in Montreal, open hostility develops between the English-speaking federalist father, and his French-speaking separatist son. The land is again accursed, as the title indicates. Of it, MacLennan said this:

> I understand the inner sense of the sphinx to be the breakdown into destruction of the Father-Son relationship within the Oedipus Complex. To overthrow the tyranny of the father in order to live is the duty of any son, but this must be recovered, and in the last Oedipus play, of course, the father asserts his right against rapacious revolution. Polyneices [Oedipus' son], comes back, as it were, with the sphinx operating in him, as he operates in today's universities and all over the world.[14]

The father/son riddle of the 60's has no easy solution. The "son-hungry man" of *Each Man's Son*, Dr. Daniel Ainslie, "did not live long enough to know whether the educational experiment he had performed on the adopted orphan had succeeded or failed." This novel invites the reader to judge.

Dr. Daniel Ainslie raised Alan without superstitious religion, but also taught that "his life ought to be some kind of Pilgrim's Progress to some kind of City of God." As Dr. Daniel required a substitute for lost ancestral religion, Alan now seeks fulfilment in political ideals. Working in External Affairs had been "almost like a religion to him," and currently, federal union is Alan's spiritual omega from "the sense of infinity that lies in the hush over the deltas of huge northern rivers...." Even young Daniel describes Alan as "a saintly kind of man. He's willing to put up with anything they do to him so long as he thinks it's for the sake of the country...." Alan, like Dr. Daniel, needs children, and "seemed to love this huge, mostly unknown country as some people love the idea of growth in a child...." Herein lies the root of family tragedy since Alan places the "sonship" of his country above immediate concern for Daniel, his bloodson. A

Calvinistic sense of duty keeps Alan almost exclusively in Ottawa, too distant from Montreal and young Daniel who feels himself "orphaned" from his father and, as a French-Canadian, culturally "orphaned" in the New World. "The pride of the unappreciated ... [is] the strongest and most self-destructive emotion anyone can nourish," says one of two wise voices in this novel. The statement exactly describes Daniel whose hostility is intensified by the lingering influence of a puritanical priest.

The austere piety of Jansenism prevented filial closeness to God. Christ was "a severe and inscrutable redeemer" for a God whose commandments were impossible even for the just who wished and endeavoured to obey them (*NCE*, VII, 825). Young Daniel, like his grandfather Dr. Daniel Ainslie, has rejected religion intellectually, but is emotionally crippled by the remains of puritanical Jansenism, and bears essentially the same burden of guilt. The "sphinx" has returned. The resultant unhealthy incapacity to love not only mars Daniel; it explains, for Alan Ainslie, the Quebec Revolution:

> ... no people in history has ever tried to break with a strict Catholicism without turning to nationalism or some other kind of ism as a surrogate religion. As I see it, that is the essence of the situation in Quebec today. The problem there isn't economic, it's psychological.... What's happening in Quebec ... is something deeper than we've ever seen before in Canada. It's a genuine revolution in a way of life, and I don't have to remind you that all revolutions have neurotic roots.

This general theory is applied specifically to the "neurotic and self-willed" Daniel by a wise, European voice in the novel. Marielle warns Daniel that there is

> nothing so terrifying as self-willed ignorance. I wish you would stop being romantic about Europe and the Old World [wars and revolutions]. People there understand things it will take you North Americans another century to learn. You are all puritans over here and don't even guess what it does to you.... Young men like you never plunge into movements like this without some kind of personal reason. Usually they don't understand what it is until it's too late and sometimes they never understand it.

Later, Marielle asks Daniel why he is "so afraid of being a man," and suggests "if a man fears [to love], then it is very natural for him to talk and dream about bombs and war." The "revolutionary" effects of severe sexual repression are described by MacLennan in a very curious passage.

After participating in a separatist-oriented television broadcast, Daniel is simultaneously "intoxicated with a feeling of power" and morbidly hypersensitive

to women on the street as "raw sex on display." Mouthing sayings of his separatist father-figure, the ironically-named Latendresse, Daniel interprets "the sexual explosion" as a prelude to the collapse of an era: "a Mardi Gras before another of history's lenten seasons ushers in the day of retribution and atonement." Daniel's destructively apocalyptic mood shares in the eschatological temperament of repressed Jansenism already discussed. His lust and hate focus on the buttocks of two girls, a "plump one wobbling and a lean one popping up and down". Leanness merges with the thin outline of a Montreal skyscraper, symbol of English domination, and it is difficult to tell whether Daniel, referring to the "thin one", means the building or the girl or, subconsciously, both:

> Yes, he thought, yes! If you chose that thin one you could do it.... If you placed the explosives at exactly the proper balance points you could bring that thin one down. You could bring it down screaming and grinding and trembling...

Rape of human being and rape of the physical environment fuse in a sick mind which cannot see repressive sexuality fostering angry, frustrated, and destructive impulses. It is "love-hunger growing imperceptibly into hunger for power." Daniel's sister Chantal evokes the inner ugliness by describing "a puritan when the bottom falls out of his character and all those polypy things that are inside of puritans come crawling out for a Mardi Gras."

Alan Ainslie sees the violent side of the Quebec Revolution as part of a "universal disease" which "came when humanity lost its faith in man's ability to improve his nature."

> When people can no longer believe in personal immortality, when society at large has abandoned philosophy, many men grow desperate without knowing why.... Some of them will do anything — no matter how hopeless, criminal or idiotic — merely to have people mention their names and recognize that they exist.... A senseless crime can be one way of passing into the only kind of immortality this sick epoch understands...

Chantal illuminates the central dilemma in both novels: "to love a person and be unable to help him — that's the most terrible thing in the world." Meanwhile Alan has learned the humanist truth that both the individual and the nation must "school" themselves toward civilization. "One more step would have freed us all, but the sphinx returned," and the land feels anew the curse of ancestral guilt.

Perhaps there is no immediate answer to the Canadian riddle of the sixties, or as yet, to the universal violence of which violence in Canada is one small part.

Therefore, to conclude that "the sphinx has returned to the world before" and the world survived, is at best a brooding optimism, yet it is all one can draw out of MacLennan's historical perspective. Still, to be able to *pose* the riddle in its localized form, is a small step forward for man, and one for Canadian literature in so far as MacLennan believes that "the substance of any living literature must come out of the society to which the writer belongs."[15]

In an essay written during the 1940's, MacLennan stated that "the psychological mould which was set in Canada in the early days" lay in its *three* founding peoples: French-Canadian colonists, United Empire Loyalists from the American colonies, and Highland Scots. Each had its peculiar puritan background, and each was a dispossessed people. Thus, while the French-Canadian must come to grips with the British conquest, the Highland Scot had endured a more devastating humiliation after the Battle of Culloden when the clan system was ruthlessly and systematically destroyed. Perhaps the three central founding cultures of early Canada share a greater similarity of experience than their differences permitted their members to see. Could her people examine clear-eyed their historical roots, they would discover that the essential Canadian problem exists inside, not outside her borders. One pathway toward national self-knowledge lies in the mutual exploration of the growth of both French- and English-Canadian culture as expressed, for example, in Canadian literature.

History reveals, says MacLennan, a dominant impulse in Canada "to retain in her own eyes the kind of personality she *feels* she has, even though she has never been able to define it in words." In this, both "French and English have an overriding common aim upon which the Canadian national character, whatever its individual manifestations may be, firmly rests."[16] It is in no way derogatory of Hugh MacLennan to say that much of his value as a novelist is precisely this: that he seeks to define the elusive Canadian truth in words.

NOTES

[1] *Journal of Canadian Studies*, V (May 1970), 10-21.

[2] *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* (Edinburgh 1918) III, 150. Cited *ERE* in text.

[3] *The New Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York 1967) VII, 820. Cited *NCE* in text.

[4] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1.15.4.

[5] "The Canadian Character" in *Cross-Country* (Toronto 1949), p. 8.

[6] "A Would-Be Saint" in *Thirty and Three* (Toronto 1954), pp. 216-217.

[7] *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (London 1967), XVIII, 462.

[8] "Scotsman's Return" in *Scotsman's Return and Other Essays* (Toronto 1961), pp. 10, 8.

[9] "Confessions of a Wood-Chopping Man" in *Scotsman's Return and Other Essays*, p. 89.

[10] Quoted in George Woodcock's *Hugh MacLennan* (Toronto 1969), p. 91.

[11] *Ibid.*

[12] Peter Buitenhuis, *Hugh MacLennan* (Toronto 1969), p. 51.

[13] Woodcock, p. 99.

[14] In Buitenhuis, p. 66.

[15] "Literature in a New Country" in *Scotsman's Return*, p. 135.

[16] "The Canadian Character" in *Cross-Country*, pp. 10-17.

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NOUVEAU ROMAN CANADIEN

Joseph Pivato

"LIFE WRITES LOUSY PLOTS!" Humphrey Bogart once observed, indicating an awareness of the role of the artist and the imagination in transforming reality into art and ultimately into a new reality. The *nouveau roman* of the last two decades is a good paradigm of recent developments in the transmutation of reality by a literary form, the novel, and by its techniques. *Le couteau sur la table* by the French-Canadian poet, novelist and film-maker, Jacques Godbout, is a novel that demonstrates many of the techniques of the *nouveau roman* as it has been fostered by the French novelists: Nathalie Sarraute, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Michel Butor and Marguerite Duras. While Godbout's Canadian novel is concerned with the national co-existence of French and English, its style indicates an awareness of a universal phenomenon, a fascination for technique, an interest in the process of creativity itself.[1]

Anyone who has read *Le couteau sur la table* will notice its affinities with film and will realize that it cannot be read as a traditional novel, as a linear exercise in realism or naturalism.[2] Rather a *nouveau roman* must be understood as a studied dramatization of the creative process itself, the conscious activity of the novelist at work. The *nouveau roman* can thus be compared to other art forms such as music, theatre and especially the film where it has been understood for a much longer time that a work of art may be shown to be a process as well as a product.

In the film, *L'Année dernière à Marienbad* (1961), director Alain Resnais achieved this effect of the creative process by alienating the spectator from the movie through a variety of techniques: re-echoing of scenes by verbal and visual juxtaposition of details; interpolation of flashbacks, some so brief as to be almost subliminal; dream sequences; rhythmical repetition of images and the use of several alternate denouements. The result of these devices seems to be to distinguish representation from reality, to define the true context of the particular art form. Robbe-Grillet wrote the script for this film in its entirety and, as in his

own *ciné-roman* and film, *L'Immortelle* (1963), he provided a shot by shot description of the film as he imagined it, including camera movements, sound, music and dialogue. In these films as in his novel, *La Jalousie*, Robbe-Grillet's images depict subjective life, not outer reality. Since the events are happening in someone's mind, the images follow no normal chronological or logical sequence but the para-logic of a dream. The universe in these films and novels is in a perpetual present tense.

There seems to be a relationship between the interest of these authors in the film medium and their *nouveau roman* techniques. Thus while in the past many novelists have written for film, none has shown such affinities between the techniques of their two media. In addition to Robbe-Grillet's collaboration with Renais we also have that of Marguerite Duras with her scripting of his film, *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959). Godbout himself has several films to his credit — among them: *Huit témoins* (1964), *Yul 871* (1966), and *Kid Sentiment* (1967), for the National Film Board. Speaking about himself Godbout has stated, "Ce que je puis affirmer aujourd'hui c'est que le cinéaste fait vivre l'écrivain; aussi bien au plan financier qu'à celui des contacts avec la réalité."[3]

Just as the film director manipulates the camera lens to give us a unique but relative point of view, the *nouveau roman* author controls his first person narrator for the same effect. He has rejected the device of the traditional omniscient narrator. Since we no longer really believe in this convention of representing fictional reality Nathalie Sarraute declares that:

> selon toute apparence, non seulement le romancier ne croit plus guère à ses personnages, mais le lecteur, de son côté, n'arrive plus à y croire ... Nous sommes entrés dans l'ère du soupçon.[4]

IF WE LOOK AT Godbout's treatment of the elements of time, memory, language and objects, especially by the use of cinematic techniques, we see that *Le couteau sur la table* deals with the interior reality of mental process, the rhythm and flow of emotion. Time is the one great dimension against which Godbout's novel brings all its resources to bear. Traditionally novelists narrated events in cosmic time and thus generally followed the linear movement of the sun, the calendar and the clock. These novelists made it quite clear when they deviated from chronology by flashbacks and recollections. Godbout has flagrantly broken this conventional time sequence. In trying to redefine the proper territory of fiction in response to the challenge of scientific knowledge and social and

political change in Canada and the world, Godbout has asserted the importance of the role of imagination.

The action in Godbout's novel takes place in the reflective consciousness of the novelist. The author's memory and imagination are used to dramatize the process of creation. This involves a partial or total disconnection of the mind from events of the external world and from public time. An important element of the independence of the reflective consciousness is thus its capacity for denying the chronology of the past. The new order which the mind inevitably gives to events will be more personal and revealing about the narrator. In *Le couteau sur la table*, then, we seem to be dealing with at least two time scales: cosmic time, the time of public reference, and private or phenomenological time, that of individual experience.

In Butor's *La Modification* time is manipulated by using the device of a railway journey between Paris and Rome. In Godbout's *nouveau roman* a central image is the railway trip of the protagonist-narrator and his girlfriend, Patricia. This train, which comes from Vancouver and crosses the map of Canada, moves through real points in space and historical time: Medicine Hat, Qu'Appelle, Assiniboia, Neepawa, Kingston, Long Sault. This journey, the measured routine of army life, references to years and to the ages of himself, Patricia and Madeleine, are points in public time against which the mind of the narrator can move freely. The narrator's first weekend meeting with Patricia is iterated over and over again in his mind, irrespective of the clock. All their weekends are one weekend that exists outside of calendar time. These are soujourns in an artificial space:

> Si les oasis ont toujours quelque chose d'artificiel, une allure figuée.... L'artifice du Lake était attachant....

The love of the French-Canadian narrator and the Anglophone Patricia exists in an oasis, artificially created, outside public time and space, as if it were only possible in such an incubator. This seems to be why the narrator can leave Patricia and then return to her and start the association all over again. In a sense their relationship never stopped, since it exists outside calendar time. The reality of their love is a mental creation of the narrator, an image that moves irrespective of the seasons which shift freely from one paragraph to the next in the novel.

Despite the freedom of the reflective consciousness, the relationship of the narrator and Patricia has limitations, even in the mind:

> C'était un amour curieux et presque à sens unique: je rêvais d'elle toute la semaine, mais parce que nous étions de langue et de culture différentes j'avais peine à imaginer ses jours, ses pensées, son enfance.

The imagination of the narrator seems unable to transcend the cultural differences of French and English and the lack of shared experiences, all of which exist in public time. The imagination needs memory and memory exists in time. In the reality of time the narrator confronts the impossible, the incommunicability that exists between two beings. And thus despite his love, Patricia always remains a stranger to the narrator who himself remains nameless:

> Je n'arrive pas à m'expliquer ce besoin que j'avais d'une femme qui me fût à ce point étrangère... une peau nordique... des cheveux d'un blond nordique... j'allais pouvoir m'acheter une identité.

The narrator moves caressingly over Patricia's lovely, white body as the train moves over the map of Canada: all unknown entities. Patricia's body, like the geography of the nation, is constantly being rediscovered:

> Patricia demeure toujours trop longtemps sous la douche, comme si elle n'en avait jamais fini de retrouver sa virginité ou son teint.

While the French narrator seeks his identity in Patricia's Anglo-Saxon body, the reality of physical contact, and while he sees this girl as "le moyen terme par lequel j'entre en contact charnel avec les cent quatre-vingt-dix millions d'individus qui m'entourent," he also sees her as an escape into oblivion: "Patricia, viens déshabille-toi, viens au lit éteins la lumière fais le vide j'ai besoin de vide de noir de désir tiens lèche ma main." Is this the self-annihilation that French Canada fears from too much association with the mass of North American English culture? With the necessity of contact comes the risk of assimilation.

> Je suis bien en toi, dans toi, collé à ton corps je t'aime Patricia j'aime ta peau, le grain de ta peau.... Je suis bien dans ta peau.

As the close-up views of Patricia's skin indicate, the narrator is attracted by her affluence and beauty but on another level he is also repelled by her and seeks consolation in the working class French-Canadian, Madeleine.

While the mind of the narrator moves freely in space, manipulating time, it also confronts us with reminders of the linear time-scale. The news story in the first chapter from (note the title) *Time* magazine draws us into public reality. This ominous note about American nuclear weapons and the other news references in the novel to plane crashes and FLQ bombings create a doomful pattern

in the time-free movement of the narration. To these emblems of death is added the narrator's consciousness of his own mortality and his fear of extinction:

> J'ai peur de mourir tout à coup, j'ai peur ... de crever sans avoir fait un seul geste qui soit humain, sans laisser derrière moi autre chose que moi qui refroidis, moi qui pourris, moi humus dans le roc et la glaise.... Demain je meurs: qui saura que j'aurai existé?

The irrepressible force of time hits the narrator most strongly with the meaningless death of Madeleine. Not only does the narrator find himself in the horrible loneliness which, like Pascal, he has dreaded throughout his life but he realizes that with the death of Madeleine's unborn child, his child, his fight against time has been frustrated. His wish to transcend time and his death by perpetuating himself in the creation of new life has died with Madeleine:

> Madeleine qui aimait la vie mourait stupidement; mais ce qui me terrifiait le plus ... c'etait surtout ce silence énorme, inattendu; Madeleine mon amour ne pouvait désormais ajouter un mot à ce qu'elle avait dit, ne pouvait plus *répondre*, ne pouvait donner naissance à ce fils que ...

This constant, and often sudden, juxtaposition of phenomenological time with public time creates a pattern of tension, a poetic pattern in the novel that has a subliminal effect on us much like the films of Renais, Lefebvre and Godbout himself. The reflective consciousness struggles against linear time by producing an artifact that has dimensions outside time. Godbout's fascination with the problem of time in literature and film is shown in his essay, "Le Temps: La Poésie du Cinéma."

> Le pouvoir de suggestion de la poésie peut donner naissance au pouvoir d'exploration du temps qui appartient au cinéma.
>
> . . . .
>
> Les arts ne sont, comme les religions, que des tentatives désespérées de contrôler le temps.
>
> . . . .
>
> La qualité de la vie d'un peuple ne dépend plus aujourd'hui que du choix qu'il fait dans son emploi du temps.[5]

THE ELEMENT most closely associated with time in the creative consciousness is the memory. In *Le couteau sur la table* the workings of the memory are exercised through interior monologue, involuntary memory and a kind of subliminal recall. Godbout's interior monologues are not in long Joyce-

ian tirades since, in a sense, the whole novel is a monologue. But we do have repeated use of mental digressions, and digressions within digressions, to which Godbout draws our attention by the use of parentheses and ellipses. By this narrative mode the action remains in the narrator's mind, and thus it is his consciousness that informs the entire novel. The time shifts, the juxtapositions of the narrator's return to Patricia with the death of Madeleine or with another memory, explore the operations of the mind speaking to itself. Every time the narrator recalls his reunion with Patricia his mind associates parts of their conversation with a different object or sensation. The narrator's dialogues with Patricia are reconstructed in various ways as the mind plays freely with time and space. With these repeated recompositions of the mind Godbout is drawing attention to the fact that his non-linear narrative is the creation of a consciousness temporarily disconnected from the reality of conventional dimensions of time and space. In Godbout's *nouveau roman*, as in Godfrey's *The New Ancestors*, the play of the mind as embodied in the narrative is constituted by the freedom to rearrange images or memories of the past without reference to a perceived reality.

Godbout's protagonist-narrator demonstrates instances of involuntary memory. Like Marcel in Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu*, the narrator fixes his mind on an object or physical sensation which in turn initiates the unintentional recall of a series of associations and memories. The narrator could be kissing Patricia, or observing her taking a shower or getting dressed and the mental process begins:

> Patricia met sa robe avec l'attention délicate des fleurs filmées au ralenti et se transforme en tache de sang contre le mur, en salvia, comme il y en avait au pied des baraquements de l'Intendance.

The action of Patricia dressing makes the narrator think of a flower filmed in slow motion, a blood stain and finally the salvia near the army barracks and the associated unpleasant recollections of army life. With this cinematic technique of the transformation of one image into another we see that the process is not logical but psychological. Did the narrator leave the restrictions of the army only to become captive to Patricia's sensuality?

At other times the involuntary memory seems to operate at a subliminal level in which the narrator is not fully conscious of the significance of the objects to which his mind keeps returning. Several images, which recur in the course of the narration and which go almost unnoticed, culminate in a climax that is brought

to crisis by the shock of Madeleine's accidental death. Several times in the novel the narrator mentions that he hears a cry. The idea of breath and suffocation reappears. If Patricia is finally killed, the narrator has strangled her. The image of an abandoned child occurs in several places. Madeleine's unborn baby is, in a sense, a lost child.

> L'appel strident des sirènes....
> Le cri d'un enfant va se répercutant dans la ville devenue boîte à écho.
>
> . . . .
>
> Seul, se retrouver seul comme un enfant abandonné par son équipe et qui ne peut plus jouer, seul, face au vent vert et frais des collines rasées....

The subtle repetition of such images throughout the novel reflects elements of the narrator's subconscious. There seems to be a memory in the narrator's mind which he is either trying to forget or recall or both. In the climax of chapter 75, the narrator's horror of being left alone, abandoned, and his fear of death are brought to the surface in a series of triple repetitions and an hallucination. The narrator's response to seeing Madeleine's dead body is one of suffering:

> J'avais mal au coeur et le besoin de m'oxygéner l'emporta.... et derrière j'entendais les cris de mon fils peut-être.
>
> . . . .
>
> De temps à autres l'appel guttural comme celui d'une poulie roullée, d'un faisan caché dans les buissons, m'était prétexte à reprendre haleine....

This paragraph is followed by a parenthetical digression which seems to be an hallucination of an incident in the narrator's past:

> Je suis seul, incapable de courir, je recule épouvanté, de plus en plus vite, à mesure que la peur gagne... de temps à autre le cri guttural d'une sorcière dont je reconnais les traits sans pouvoir la nommer me force à reprendre haleine....

This series of associations is followed by a childhood memory of the narrator lost in the snow storm at five years of age:

> Dans la neige cette fois. J'ai cinq ans. Je ne vois rien dans la tempête ni ma mère ... j'entends le cri guttural d'un homme qui hurle a perdre haleine.... Une chambre d'hôpital... le linge est blanc et la main de ma mère; je me rendors.

The lost child is not only the narrator at five but also the narrator's child. The *cri* is both their cries. But while, for the narrator, the blinding whiteness of the snow storm has become the white comfort of the bedsheets, either with his mother

holding his hand or with Patricia, for his child, the breath has been stopped forever.

But there is something more going on in this cinematic repetition and juxtaposition of images. Is it possible to see these memories of the child abandoned by his team as a racial memory of French Canada? Is it possible to associate the fear of being lost in the snow, the narrator's horror of death without progeny and of suffocation, with the natural instinct of a race for perpetuating itself physically and culturally? One recalls Jean-Pierre Lefebvre's film, *Jusqu'au cœur,* with its repeated colour shots of frogs being swallowed by larger animals of prey.

THE CINEMA-LIKE TECHNIQUES which show the operation of the memory are successful devices for communicating the process of the reflective consciousness because they always use objects of the external, visual world in which to anchor the emotional import of the thoughts. In Godbout's *nouveau roman* the objects are the contents of the narrator's consciousness, which can be roughly identified with that of the author himself. Without the objects there would be no self in the novel and without a self no objects. As in a film, this presence of selected things in the work is evidence that a reflective mind is there to sustain them. Objects such as Patricia's red dress, the bed, the artificial lake, the C.N. train and the knife, that have become the property of the consciousness, are significant for that consciousness.

In *Le couteau sur la table* the mode of narration is an implicit one, the narrator remains silent on the explicit meaning of the stream of objects, images and events of which the novel is an inventory. As in the film, *L'Année dernière à Marienbad,* the responsibility for abstraction is surrendered to each member of the audience, who can at least be confident that each one of the images or objects is of significance. Since in the *nouveau roman* the narrator is stripped of his traditional powers of conceptualization, the communication relies on the mental picture formed by the reader, sometimes only on the subliminal level. By this elimination of the intermediary presence, Godbout is attempting a more immediate mode of fiction in which the reader is confronted by the contents of another consciousness, objects assembled with an artistic intent. Godbout is narrating with the unique but relative point of view of the camera lens.

The visual orientation of the narrator is constantly evident. Early in the novel he caresses Patricia's naked body with his eyes:

> Je la suis des yeux, dans une caresse avouée; son dos blanc rayé par les taches de lumière que le store vénitien laisse couler entre des lames horizontales, un corps zébré, puis le noir, l'ombre. . . .

The final close-up images in the novel emphasize the visual perspective:

> Le couteau restera sur la table de la cuisine. Aucune trace de sang sur les tapis.

The ambivalence of the knife image is reinforced by its visual quality. The violence suggested by the knife seems to be tempered by its position on the kitchen table. Is the knife for dining or killing or for both?

As in the stream of consciousness work of Proust and Joyce, in Godbout's *nouveau roman* the powers of the mind and language are combinatory rather than inventive. The imagination has to work with public facts that have been absorbed into the individual consciousness and retained in the memory. It is the discontinuity of these objects and our language, a discontinuity reflected in our direct perceptions of the external world, which enables us to select and combine them into a fiction. It is this technique of direct perception that Godbout demonstrates in his film, *Kid Sentiment*, a *cinéma-vérité* work that gives the impression that it has produced itself. Godbout then operates poetically in prose and film since, "The poetic function projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination."[6]

In his work Godbout upholds the freedom of the mind, a free mind which bestows significance on things by the use of language. The literary artist uses language to transform a world which is desacralized, demythologized, a world which no longer has absolute or essential meaning. Godbout has said:

> L'écriture littéraire est une exploration du langage, comme on dit que les cosmonautes explorent l'espace. Il y a un espace dans les mots, entre les mots, que l'écrivan fouille. . . .
>
> . . . .
>
> L'écriture veut faire dégorger les mots. Le cinéma veut faire dégorger le temps. La problématique du langage, sondée par le style d'un écrivain, donne l'oeuvre littéraire.
>
> . . . .
>
> C'est à ce point précis que l'écriture littéraire et le cinéma se peuvent rejoindre: dans la poésie.[7]

By trying to employ language in a way similar to that in which a film-maker uses time, Godbout, like McLuhan, is anticipating changes in perception and sensibility that have yet to come to pass. Thus just as the protagonist-narrator in *Le*

couteau sur la table is struggling with the stereotypes of English and French, so Godbout in his *nouveau roman* is rebelling against literary habits, against formal stereotypes which have come to be accepted in Canadian literature as representative and indispensable rather than relative. To the authors of the *nouveau roman*, both in France and in Canada, the novel is in need of redefinition, and the responsibility of the writer is to show the function and form of fiction, and by extension, what the role of the imagination is in our lives. But this is both a difficult and dangerous experiment for to change aesthetic conventions is ultimately to help in changing reality. Godbout himself has been quoted as saying:

> J'écris pour les mêmes raisons qui font que j'aime, que je marche, que je lis, que j'agis; pour connaître.
>
> . . . .
>
> Le roman d'ajourd'hui ne peut être qu'une façon de vivre c'est-a-dire, je crois, de connaître d'expérimenter la vie dans le mystère de l'oeuvre d'art, et souvent d'être heureux.[8]

NOTES

[1] Ronald Sutherland, "The Fourth Separatism," *Canadian Literature*, No. 45: 7-23, and also in *Second Image*, 1971, briefly discusses the theme of Godbout's novel as do: Maurice Blain, "Conscience de l'Etrangeté," *Cité Libre*, XV, No. 76 (Avril, 1965), 29-32 and René Garneau, "Révolte plutôt que révolution," in *Présence de la critique*, ed. Gilles Marcotte, 1966.

[2] This is clearer in the French edition, used throughout this essay (Montreal: Editions du Seuil, 1965). The McClelland and Stewart edition of Penny Williams' translation is somewhat adequate.

[3] "Le Temps: La Poésie du Cinéma," *Canadian Literature*, No. 46, p. 84.

[4] *L'ère du soupçon: essais sur le roman,* (Paris: Gallimard, 1959), pp. 71 and 74.

[5] *Canadian Literature,* op. cit., pp. 85-88.

[6] Roman Jakobson, "Linguistics and Poetics," in *Essays on the Language of Literature,* eds. S. Chatman and S. R. Levin (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1967), p. 303.

[7] "Le Temps: La Poésie du Cinéma," op. cit., p. 85.

[8] In Réjean Robideaux, "Une approche du 'Nouveau roman'," *Incidences: revue littéraire,* No. 8 (Mai, 1965), pp. 12-13.

LITTERATURE DE QUEBEC

Langue et Identité

Naim Kattan

POUR PRENDRE LA mesure d'une réalité qu'il tente de saisir avant de l'assumer, le romancier du Québec doit inventer un langage et, en s'écartant de la tradition française, prendre le risque de réduire son propos à une attitude, un geste, une prise de position qui l'enferment dans une voie sans issue.

Un des premiers à l'avoir pleinement compris est Réjean Ducharme qui, surtout dans *L'Avalée des avalés*, a cheminé sur la corde raide, dans un jeu de bascule entre le langage et l'identité. Pour inventer un langage qui corresponde à une identité émergeant difficilement de l'ombre, il a inventé un langage ayant souvent, peut être trop souvent, recours à des jeux de mots. Dans sa pièce *Le Cid maghané* Réjean Ducharme met en opposition le langage parlé direct et la langue apprise, littéraire, qui relie à une tradition et à un pays lointain: la France.

Ce dilemme est-il insoluble? Dans un roman très brillant, *D'Amour, P.Q.*, Jacques Godbout en fait le tour. Deux jeunes secrétaires vivent ensemble. L'une d'elle tape à la machine les manuscrits d'un écrivain. Celui-ci écrit dans une langue qui se veut pure, qui est surtout recherchée, ampoulée; la dactylo, directe et spontanée, s'insurge contre l'artifice. Elle corrige le texte et, non satisfaite, rencontre l'auteur, lui insufle, avec son corps et son langage, un véritable élan de vie. Il écrira désormais sous sa dictée, sous la dictée du réel et du vécu. Faut-il alors écrire dans le langage direct, celui que l'on parle? Mais lequel? Le *joual* pose plus de problèmes qu'il n'en résoud. Le langage parlé est à la fois multiple et éphémère. Il appartient à une classe sociale, à une ville, à un quartier, à un métier, à une génération. Il se transforme constamment. L'écrivain qui en fait usage est toujours dépassé. S'il est véridique, il apparaît plus artificiel, plus tra-

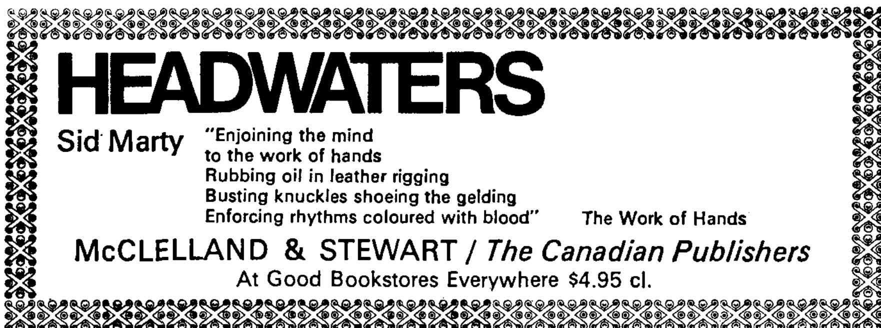
ditionaliste, que celui qui se rattache à une véritable tradition littéraire. Car les oeuvres ne naissent pas uniquement d'un rapport avec la vie, elles naissent également de la littérature. Et en vérité cette langue "jouale" n'est pas un décalque du réel. Pour donner lieu à des oeuvres, elle doit être inventée, elle doit être artificiellement créée.

André Langevin publie un nouveau roman. Il brise un silence de quinze ans. Dans ses précédents romans, il a êvoqué le mal de vivre de l'homme qui étouffe dans l'espace où il est obligé de vivre, qu'il s'agisse d'une petite ville minière où d'un Nord de neige et de glace. Dans son nouveau roman *l'Elan d'Amérique*, l'espace physique et l'espace intérieur sont mis face à face. L'espace extérieur n'est pas intériorisé dans la conscience et le personnage qui est constamment en quête d'une identité est toujours en fuite, à la recherche d'un nouvel espace, forcé d'avoir recours à des langues étrangères, qu'il s'agisse de l'anglais ou de l'espagnol.

L'un des personnages est une femme francophone née aux Etats-Unis. Elle y a vécu, elle s'est mariée mais elle est en perte de personnalité. Un autre personnage, un bûcheron fruste, obligé de vivre avec des Anglais, qui le dominent parce qu'ils l'obligent de changer de langue pour gagner sa vie, ne trouve même pas une consolation à côté du véritable indigène, l'Indien qui résiste un peu mieux puisqu'il a une plus grande habitude de la menace qui pèse sur son identité. Leur rencontre de circonstance ne les unit pas car si l'Indien trouve dans la neige et la glace un espace naturel, le québecois cherche une liberté, une épreuve qui confirmerait sinon sa force du moins son existence. Une danseuse péruvienne lui donne le seul cadeau qu'il ait reçu: un amour intense et éphémère. Dès lors cette chaleur qu'elle évoque devient le rappel lancinant d'un espace où il pourrait se mouvoir naturellement; non dans la lutte et la recherche d'une victoire sur une nature hostile, mais dans le bonheur et le bien-être offerts gratuitement, sans contre-partie. *L'Elan d'Amérique*, cet animal sauvage, est finalement vaincu. L'homme et la femme qui ont voulu se mesurer à l'espace perdent la bataille, ils sont vaincus. Ils n'ont gagné ni liberté, ni identité. Ce sont des victimes et leur défaite est en pure perte.

Dans *Un rêve québecois*, Victor-Lévy Beaulieu ne tente pas de réinventer le joual, il emprunte à la langue parlée des mots, des expressions. Dans la recherche d'une adéquation entre le rêve et la réalité psychique de ses personnages, et des mots qu'ils utilisent pour les exprimer, la langue diminuée correspond à une identité tronquée. Le rêve québecois est en réalité un cauchemar. Un homme privé de tout son être tombe dans la folie quand il s'aperçoit de son impuissance

face au réel. Il ne lui reste qu'un ultime recours: son misérable corps qu'il utilise pour torturer sa femme. Sa violence est dérisoire, inutile. Le corps qu'il maltraite, qu'il détruit, ne lui donne même pas la mesure d'un monde extérieur. Sa violence l'enferme dans une prison où il se trouve finalement seul. Il n'a d'autre issue que de se détruire lui-même n'ayant pas trouvé le moyen de sortir de sa coquille. La bataille était perdue d'avance. Aucune identité n'était au bout de la route sauf l'expression de l'impasse, de l'exaspération. Sans doute si une issue semblait possible, la langue aurait été un refuge, une coquille, qui paradoxalement, l'aurait libéré de son ghetto.



POEMS BY SAINT-DENYS-GARNEAU

These poems, all taken from the body of verse posthumously published under the title Les Solitudes, *are already familiar to French readers; some of them have been anthologized, and many individual lines quoted in articles and critical studies. They have thus entered the mainstream of French-Canadian poetry, and undoubtedly influenced its progress during the 1950's. The actual manuscripts, however, show they were in various stages of completion at the time of the poet's death in 1943; at any rate they*

WHAT AM I DOING

What am I doing hanging to this rope
This rope, a star suspended by its light alone,
Shall I die hanging here
Or die like a drowned man weary of his shipwreck
Who slips into the all-embracing sea
That true sister who embraces us
Transposes the light as we descend
And holds it against our eyes, filling them full

Remember the sea that cradled you
Old deadman swung to the soundings of the lead,
Companioned by green light,
Disturbing with your wash the order of her motion
Over the beds of the unnumbered waves,
And now stroked by seaweed in the quiet depths
Remember the waves and how they cradled you
Old deadman buried in silence undersea.

Translated by John Glassco

were not fair copies, and the poems must be regarded as "work in progress". But though unfinished, they are far from being fragments: the openings, key lines and closes are there, the direction and plan apparent; all that is wanting is the final polish such a meticulous writer as Saint-Denys-Garneau gave everything he wrote. The French text is that of the Poésies complètes *edited by Robert Elie and Jean Le Moyne (Fides, Montreal & Paris, 1949).* J.G.

ANOTHER ICARUS

It's out of the wind it's in the wind
It's only a hole we make in our passage through it
A knot we tie in the fleeting thread of time

And well we know that across this slender thread we've made,
Across these shaky stations built on the journey of our going,
There is only a cry towards the depths that are forever
There is only a cry
from a place that lasts forever
Where the stems of the fruits are already broken
And all the stalks of the flowers and petals of the flowers
are devoured
Where these feather-wings of our waxen soul have already melted
Only feathers in the wind feathers floating on the wind
With no home port.

IT IS THEY...

It is they who have killed me
Struck me in the back with their weapons, who killed me
Struck me to the heart with their hatred, who killed me
Struck on my nerves with their howling, who killed me

It is they in their avalanche who have crushed me
Splintered me like a log of wood

Snapped my nerves like a cable of iron wire cut short
When all the threads in a wild bouquet
Spring out and curl back in quivering points

Who crumbled my body like dry bread
Picked my heart to pieces like a crust
Scattered it all into the night

They have trodden it all down without even seeming to
Without knowing or wanting to know or being able to know
Without thinking, without caring
Only by their terrible mysterious strangerhood
Because they did not come to me to embrace me

Oh into what wilderness we must go
To die quietly by ourselves.

AFTER THE OLDEST

After the oldest of the vertigoes
After the longest of declines
And the slowest poisons
One day at noon
Your bed as certain as the tomb

To our bodies fainting on the sands
Yawned like the sea.

After the slowest of approaches
The fieriest of caresses
After your body a pillar
Bright and consummately hard
My body a river outspread and pure to the water's edge.

Between us the ineffable happiness
Of distance
After the brightness of the marble
The first movements of our cries
And suddenly the weight of the blood
Foundered within us like a shipwreck
The weight of the fire fell on our perished hearts

After the final sigh
And the fire had crossed the shadow on the ground
The cables of our arms are cast off for a mortal journey
The bonds of our embraces fall of themselves
and go adrift on our bed
Stretching out now like a desert
And all the inhabitants are dead
And our perished eyes see nothing more
Our eyes blinded by the pupils of desire
As our love vanished like an unbearable shadow
And we felt our isolation rising like an impassable wall.

Under the red sky of my eyelids
The mountains
Are companions of my arms
And the forests burning in the darkness
And the wild beasts
Passing with the claws of your fingers
O my teeth
And the whole earth dying in a vise

Then blood covering the earth
And the secrets burnt alive
And all the mysteries torn to pieces
Night was delivered in our final cry

It was then she came
Again and again
It was then she passed through me
Again and again
Bearing my heart upon her head
Like an urn which kept its radiance.

ADVENTURINGS

Adventurings have come to us from the world's end
When you come from afar it is not to remain there
(When you come from afar it was because you had to leave)
Our glances are tired of being swept by the same trees
By the saw against the sky of the same trees
And our arms of sweeping at the same place forever.
Our feet no longer fixed us there to the earth
They were drawing our bodies to days beyond our sight.

Imperative departures have been ours
From the first departure of all and thence unendingly
Beyond our sight and into a horizon of renewals
Which is only this appeal from afar that shapes the landscape
Or that cliff-like barrier
Which lashes the rage of our desire to know
And whose weight winds up within us
The spring of our saltation

We have not had too many snows to eat
We have not had too many winds and storms to drink
We have not had too much ice to carry
Nor too many dead to carry upon our icy hands

There are those who could not leave
Who dared not wish to leave
Who had no joy in their eyes with which to kiss the spaces
Who had no lightnings of blood in their arms to open them
They fell asleep on the benches
Their souls were stolen from them while they slept
They awoke with a start like those servants
Whom the master surprises at their idleness

We, we had no desire to stop
We had not too much weariness to conquer
For the franchise of our gestures into space
For the freedom of our eyes on every place
For the free bounding of our hearts over the hills

And there are those who did not wish to go
Who wished not to go but to stay

We look at them and shrug our shoulders
We are not of the same race.

They have awakened, these animals in the pen
Who spend their soulless ardour in the brothels
And return to a mindless sleep
They have awakened, these book-keepers, busybodies,
Devourers of neighbours, classifiers of sins,
Collectors of taxes, inchmeal assassins,
Eaters of souls, the well-pleased, the prudent,
Arse-kissers, bootlickers, bowers and scrapers,
Who renounce longwindedly and with perfect composure,
Having nothing to renounce.

This is a country of little creatures to be stepped on
You cannot see them because they're dead
But you'd like to boot them in the behind
And see them underground for the sake of the beauty of
unpeopled space.

The others, we are the wild ones, we are the all-alone
In our heads there is only the thought of embracing
We have only the taste for going forth, the taste like a hunger
We are already where we are no longer
We have no business here
We have nothing to say and we hear no voice of any friend.

MUSIC AND MEDICINE

Michael Beausang

THE SEARCH FOR NATIONAL AND PERSONAL IDENTITY, those precarious and related modes of being essential to action, dominates all that Hubert Aquin has written. Yet, as is true of all major writers committed to a cause, his art successfully transcends the self-imposed limits of a *littérature engagée*. This is not to say that his novels should be bowdlerized of their political message in order to appeal to English-speaking Canadians. Apart from insulting the intelligence of prospective readers, such a proceeding would misrepresent his work as a whole. Still, it appears to be true that from a critical point of view Aquin's dedication to the cause of Quebec separatism has produced an excessive political bias in assessments of his work, with the result that the reasons given for his genuine distinction as a novelist are often the wrong ones, and few concerted efforts have been made to come to terms with either *Trou de memoire* or *L'Antiphonaire*.

To explore a relatively uncharted area has its compensations. It also has its dangers. *L'Antiphonaire* is an extremely complex book and a brief attempt to summarize the plot, though bound to betray the sophistication of its sexual wit, is unfortunately necessary to our argument. Initially a straightforward story narrated by an ex-medical student, Christine, married to an epileptic named Jean-William Forestier, it quickly develops into an involved account of rape, murder and destruction, in which alternating personalities, living in different historical periods, echo and counterpoint one another in a clever, if bitter, antiphonal exercise. The nub of much of this activity is Christine's thesis — a survey of medical science in the sixteenth century which singles out for special attention Jules-Cesar Beausang, a disciple of Paracelsus, who, among other things, advocated the adoption of the experimental method, and penned a notable description of epilepsy.

Shortly after the opening of the novel, Christine's husband undergoes an epileptic attack, his ninth, and in the course of her efforts to obtain drugs for

him she is "violated" by a Californian pharmacist. Parallel with these events, in literary space if not in time, Renata Belmissieri, a Renaissance courtesan whom Christine describes as her double, sets out to deliver Beausang's final manuscript *Traité des maladies nouvelles* to a Chivasso printer, Carlo Zimara. Raped by Carlo, Renata sees justice done when Carlo is stabbed to death by his wife, Antonella. But her troubles have only begun. She is next sexually molested by Chigi, an abbé of Turin, who hands her over to the police as Zimara's killer, and, doubling for both the printer and Beausang, heads off to France with the unrepentent Antonella, leaving Renata to be hanged for a crime she never committed. Once in Lyon, Chigi *alias* Zimara *alias* Beausang, manages to make a living on the strength of Beausang's reputation and manuscript, and ironically, and aptly enough, dies of syphilis, one of the new diseases described by the great doctor.

This is, roughly summarized, the Renaissance wing in Aquin's picaresque comedy. On the modern side, Christine manages to make herself the focal point of as disastrous a web of events as those enveloping her Renaissance counterpart, Renata. Jean-William, having discovered the identity of the pharmacist who violated his wife, shoots him. But Christine has more than one beau to her string. She returns from California to Montreal to her lover, Robert Bernatchez, an ambitious Quebec politician. Jean-William follows, and guns down Bernatchez who is committed to the Sacré Coeur hospital with severe damage to the head and central nervous system. Somewhat disconcerted at the prospect of having a second invalid on her hands, Christine compromises herself by capitulating before the sexual advances of Robert's doctor, Albert Franconi. But by now she is a tortured, demoralized, not to say, abused, young woman, and unable to equate her acts with her ideal self, she commits suicide. Jean-William follows suit, and the final entry in the novel is a letter from Franconi to his wife Suzanne, informing her that he, too, is about to put an end to his days.

Clearly, Beausang's *Traité des maladies nouvelles*, Christine's "La science médicale au XVIeme siècle", and Aquin's novel, are all one and the same, related mirror-images of the creator reflecting upon his own work. What we are reading is at one level a political allegory in which Christine's "crucifixion" symbolizes the exploitation of Quebec, both by her own politicians (Robert Bernatchez) and American interests (Christine's abortive affair with Robert W. Shact and her rape by the California pharmacist). Her pregnancy by Jean-William at a time when, as we shall see, she herself appears to have contracted syphilis, would seem to convey Aquin's reservations about the direction events are

taking in Quebec. In a word, Quebec is ill, and the extensive medical and pharmaceutical drama culminating in the death of Christine might well be taken as a fictional *memento mori* of the province's aspirations to political and social independence. Thus, infidelity is the key-note of the novel in so far as the human relationships are concerned, but politically this "lack of faith" would appear to reflect Aquin's disenchantment with the betrayal of a revolution.

But, as we noted earlier, the subject of Aquin's revolutionary commitment has tended to divert attention from the technique of historical parallelism by which social and political comment are passed on to the reader. As the title of the novel suggests, the idea of manipulating a continuous parallel between a twentieth-century story and the different episodes comprising a sixteenth-century tale of intrigue, appears to have originated in the author's interest in music.

ANTIPHONY IS LITERALLY the art of "counter-sounding", of playing off one choral group against another. This, is, of course, exactly what Aquin does in *L'Antiphonaire*, where modern and Renaissance choral groups counterpoint one another across an acoustical gap of well over four hundred years. Such "musical accords" enable him to propose a resolution to the problem of time and history in the context of the novel, at the same time that they serve to illustrate what Ulrich and Pick, speaking of Hebrew responsorial singing, have called "the expression of one thought in two different ways".[1] However, despite the wide range of meanings acquired by the words "antiphon" and "antiphony" through the ages, it is, perhaps, most useful to interpret Aquin's art of counterpoint in the restricted sense of a sentence or passage sung by one choir in response to another.

As a musical form antiphony is of special interest to the writer because traditionally it places most emphasis on a faithful interpretation of the text. Indeed, until the eighth and ninth centuries Antiphonaries included nothing more than the texts, and under the influence of the sixteenth-century revival of interest in classical literature, the musical contemporaries of Jules-César Beausang applied themselves to the exegesis of liturgical texts with fresh energy. As for the texts featured in early Christian antiphonal singing, these were borrowed from the Jews, with each choral group singing successive verses of a psalm. But, in tracing the downfall of Christine, Aquin would appear to be especially interested in the Holy Week use of antiphons deriving from the Song of Songs.[2] By relating

Christine's promiscuity and syphilitic calvary to the liturgical theme of the *unio mystica* between Christ and the Church, and the impending crucifixion of Good Friday, Aquin reinforces his presentation of the Quebec situation and parodically reminds us that séparatisme aims at religious, as well as political emancipation. Here, again, one recognizes a savage portrayal of the violation of revolutionary trust for as Isidore Epstein reminds us, the original Canticle of Canticles "glorifies perfect love that remains constant and steadfast amid all allurement and seductive influences."[3]

Rhythm is basic to musical expression, yet it also has an important place in medicine and sexual activity. A patient's pulse-beat is an index to his state of health and an important aspect of Jules-César Beausang's contribution to medicine is his insistence on "l'aspect clinique de la médicine, l'auscultation". Yet, when two beat as one, as Dr. Franconi acknowledges to his wife, the keeping of rhythm becomes doubly difficult: "Notre harmonie s'est transformée en une discorde permanente." Christine also admits to a fear of having offended the reader with "mes harmonies discordantes, ma deformis conformitas". But the explicit analogy between sexual possession and surrender to music is most clearly drawn in the scene in which Renata is seduced by l'Abbé Chigi: "Renata se laissait bercer par la musique psalmodiée du Cantique des Cantiques: elle etait ravie, elle voulait etre la plus belle des femmes... Elle se laissait caresser divinement par son mystique époux." As John Hollander notes: "It is natural that the various meanings of the word ravish (violent sexual possession, bewilderment, ecstatic separation of the soul from body) should tend to cluster more about the erotic senses when applied to music. The overtones of 'rape' become increasingly prominent in its more generally applied cognates 'ravish' and 'rapture'..."[4] Yet what is most striking about Aquin's account of Chigi's exploitation of Renata is not the lascivious Abbe's sexual ineptitude, but the fact that his climax should be made synchronous with an epileptic seizure on Renata's part.

This startling equation between epilepsy and the sex act is undoubtedly one of the most significant organizational elements in the novel. We can begin to account for it by noting that the medical characteristics of seizure are often "musically" expressed as an interruption of the body's rhythms: "The rhythm of the body when orderly spells health. Dysrhythmia is a disease."[5] Man is, in a sense, a musical instrument regulated by the automatic periodicity of his own heart-beat. Furthermore, as Dr. William Gordon Lennox points out: "Orgasm is a sensory-motor seizure, a fact succinctly phrased by the Romans: 'Coitus brevis

epilepsia est'."[6] But the notion that the sex act is a gentle epilepsy has an extremely long and well-documented history and the first indication of its widespread acceptance appears in its attribution to Democritus of Abdera by no less an authority than Galen. Reference has already been made to syphilis in the novel, and Owsei Temkin's remark that "It did not escape the attention of the Renaissance physicians that many syphilitics developed epileptic convulsions"[7] also helps to explain the simultaneous presence of both ailments in *l'Antiphonaire.*

It is no secret, moreover, that the greatest challenge to medical science in the Renaissance was that posed by syphilis. Now, Christine informs us that Jules-César Beausang's concepts of medical practice were elaborated in the year 1530. Why this particular year should be invoked in the context of syphilis seems apparent from a number of references to Girolamo Fracastoro. It was in 1530 that Fracastoro's poem, *Syphilis sive Morbus Gallicus* first appeared, giving the name "syphilis" to what was known to the Italians of the time as "the French disease". Similarly, the reason for dubbing Beausang (an anticipation of Harvey?) Jules-César is probably that the Roman emperor represents a classical instance of epilepsy: "The aura mentioned . . . of tingling and trembling of one foot, spreading upward, suggests a cortical lesion, arising perhaps from his Caesarean delivery, or, as Barois suggested, from syphilis, for was he not the 'husband of all the women in Rome?' "[8]

Renata Belmissieri, Christine's double, is conjured up by her "quand je tente, par projection, d'imaginer et de figurer une femme en proie aux spasmes recurrents de la crise d'épilepsie." Elsewhere, she is described by Antonella as a prostitute. Antonella herself is accused of prostitution by Robert Bernatchez while Christine admits that in Jean-William's eyes "j'étais déjà pure putain . . . Depuis je semble me conformer à cette image de moi — mon comportement me fait horreur". In so far as sixteenth-century values impinge upon the novel it is useful to recall Armen Carapetyan's comment that "Never before had prostitution been granted the freedom and social sanction which it enjoyed in the Renaissance".[9] By all accounts one can make a strong case for regarding the text of l'Antiphonaire as the memoirs of an educated Montreal courtesan undergoing treatment for advanced syphilis. But if this is so, the memoirs also epitomize the political sickness and exploitation of Quebec both by her own "doctors" and outside "consultants". No surprise, then if her condition fails to improve, and if, in Beausang's words, "l'humanité toute entière continue d'attraper la Grande Vérole."

The advantage of giving Christine's physical and psychological sickness a Re-

naissance dimension is that it immediately brings into play a fundamental assumption of medicine in the period: that of the natural analogy between macrocosm and microcosm. For Paracelsus (and Beausang is, after all, a disciple of Bombastus) the health of the individual cannot be divorced from events in the outside world: "Earthquakes and falling sickness have the same causes . . . for the motion of the earth is also the motion of man and is experienced by all which grows on the earth",[10] or as Beausang puts it in the novel: "La terre vit comme tous les êtres vivants; elle est une personne plus grande, plus vaste que les autres créatures de Dieu."

Rather surprisingly, then, Christine turns out to be French-Canada's Hotspur ("Diseased Nature oftentimes breaks forth/In strange eruptions"), and nothing could better describe the gamut of the author's attempts to imaginatively rehabilitate the patient than that ancient adage of Demetrius: "Medicine, to produce health, has to examine disease, and music, to create harmony, must investigate discord".[11] Whatever one's views on the state of the province, it is impossible to deny *l'Antiphonaire* its due place alongside the wittiest and best-conceived works to emerge from Quebec at this or any other time.

NOTES

[1] Homer Ulrich and Paul A. Pisk, *A history of music and musical and musical style* (New York and Chicago, 1963) p. 11.

[2] For the Song of Songs motif see pages 87-95, 117, 119, 123, 221, 224, 228, 233-234.

[3] Isidore Epstein, *Judaism* (London, 1959) p. 77.

[4] John Hollander, *The untuning of the sky* (New York, 1970) p. 200.

[5] William Gordon Lennox, *Epilepsy and related disorders* (Boston and Toronto, 1960) Vol. I. p. 4.

[6] Lennox, p. 3.

[7] Owsei Temkin, *The falling sickness* (Baltimore and London, 1971) p. 187.

[8] Lennox, *op. cit.* Vol. II p. 707.

[9] Armen Carapetyan "Music and medicine in the Renaissance and in the 17th and 18th centuries" in *Music and Medicine* ed. Dorothy M. Schullian and Max Schoen (New York, 1948) p. 135.

[10] Lennox, *op. cit.* Vol. I. p. 3.

[11] Plutarch, "Demetrius", in *The lives of the noble Grecians and Romans* trans. John Dryden, revised by Arthur Hugh Clough (New York, Modern Library, n.d.) p. 1073.

review articles

LIVESAY'S TWO SEASONS

Robin Skelton

DOROTHY LIVESAY, *Collected Poems: The Two Seasons*. McGraw-Hill Ryerson.

DOROTHY LIVESAY begins the foreword to her *Collected Poems* with the statement: "These poems written between 1926 and 1971 create an autobiography; a psychic if not a literal autobiography," and thus directs our attention rather to the personality than the philosophy of the collection. We are not, it seems, to look for an intellectual schema; we are not to think of the poet as a teacher in the way that we think of Yeats, or Stevens, or Pound; we are not to expect the vatic, the prophetic, the oracular: we are simply to take the poems as the story of a life, its passing thoughts, its occasional intensities, its doubts, its confusions, its sudden clarities.

The book certainly seems to be of this kind. There are many occasional poems, many anecdotes; the language is frequently a little pedestrian, a little too casual, so that we feel the poet's modesty may have led her to accept small returns rather than labour for masterpieces. Many of the images are commonplace; many of the cadences are tired and predictable. A good many poems would be improved by cutting; some miss the target completely. The dramatic poems are often marred by conventional rhetoric. Thus in *A Prophet of the New World* we read, with a sinking feeling, the line "He is my son. Louis Riel, my son," and, a little earlier, the Yeats-like "What poet, or what dreamer, caught in music of his own imagining?" Clichés are not infrequent: "fevered spirit", "air is sweet", "blot out the memory", "bright golden wings" are some of them. Lapses of this kind might well destroy one's faith in a poet of less obvious integrity, but Dorothy Livesay's work reveals such passionate honesty of feeling, and such consistent moral courage, that even the grossest defects become, like those of Thomas Hardy, curiously endearing. It is as if the poet were more concerned with the poem itself than with the reputation of the poem, more concerned to spell out the thought and feeling in simple and direct ways than to labour after an elegance of sophistication that might pervert the meaningful into the marmoreal. This is clearly an honest book.

Honesty is not often considered to be among the supreme poetic virtues. Poets

should be good liars, said Yeats, who was one. It might even seem that in stressing Dorothy Livesay's honesty I am damning the book with the faintest of praise. Such is not my intention; I am concerned only to suggest that the stylistic defects appear to derive from the same cause as the poetic excellence: an integrity of feeling that distrusts the straining after rhetorical effects, and seeks to explore the texture of human experience in "a selection of the language really used by men".

Such language must necessarily include the platitudes, the clichés and the stock expressions of current speech as did the language of Wordsworth, and it must, like the language of Wordsworth, attempt the impersonation of the unsophisticated memorialist, and the innocent visionary. Dorothy Livesay's poetry is capable, not only of Wordsworthian leisureliness with its attendant subtleties and longueurs, but also of the gnomic clarity which illuminates the Lucy poems, and which is characteristic of those later romantics, Emily Brontë and Emily Dickinson, whom Ms. Livesay celebrates in one of her poems. Thus we read:

> I saw my thought a hawk
> Through heaven fly:
> On earth my words were shadow of
> His wings, his cry.
>
> How many clouded days
> Precede the fair —
> When thought must unrecorded pass
> Through sunless air.
>
> (*I Saw My Thought.*)

and the two-line poem, *Going to Sleep*

> I shall lie like this when I am dead —
> But with one more secret in my head.

In these intense lyrics of the 1920s Dorothy Livesay indicates one of the primary impulses in her early work — the impulse to record, to set down, the moment. The language of these lyrics is traditional, non-innovative, and occasionally has that wayward oddity which is characteristic of Emily Dickinson. The poem *Now I am Free* exemplifies this.

> Now, I am free
> But prejudice
> Will creep like moss
> On an olding tree.
>
> Shall I then be
> My parents' child —
> A desperate grasp
> Towards fixity?

Here I wonder why, if there had to be a comma in the first stanza, it should be after "Now" and not after "free"; I am teased by the word "olding" used instead of "aging", and curious why the slightly clumsy sound of "Towards" is used rather than the more obvious "At"? There are answers to these questions. The smoother "At" would not give the "grasp" the awkwardness required, and the word "olding", because at a slight distance from normal speech, suggests a straining to capture the thought, and thus gives a stronger impression of sincerity. Nevertheless I cannot help being doubtful of my own explanation. This doubt is unhappily increased when I read adjacent poems and perceive slipshod organization, and unnecessary commonplaces.

> My guardian angel, sick and sad at heart
> Now turns away his head
> And stands beside the door, where long ago
> He stood beside my bed.
>
> (*The Husband*)

From this it seems that there has been some architectural upheaval; the door is now placed where, long ago, the bed stood. It seems improbable. And why, if we are to punctuate at all, is there not a

comma after "heart"? Should not the word "where" be replaced with "though"? Ellipsis is perhaps responsible for some clumsiness. The second verse of this poem runs:

> How I remember his bright golden wings
> To comfort me at night
> That now are folded back as though to fall
> In lonely downward flight.

This appears to say ' "I remember" the "bright golden wings" in order to comfort myself' but that cannot be correct, for later, in the next stanza, we are told that "My guardian angel hears no prayer from me." We must be required to understand the verse to mean "How I remember his bright golden wings that used to comfort me at night." I don't understand the reason for the word "How", nor why it is necessary to remember the wings if the angel is standing in full view at the door. And, surely, the word "flight" implies the use of wings? If the wings are folded back the angel will drop like a stone. The poem concludes:

> My guardian angel hears no prayer from
> me —
> I worship earth and sky:
> He goes the way of childhood, all too far
> For me to hear his cry.

This is baffling. How can he be out of earshot if he is standing by the door, unless, of course his wings are "folded back" in such a way as to block his ears? In what way is he "all too far"? In order to assent to this poem we are obliged to accept the confusion of the statement as evidence of the speaker's emotional disturbance, and thus regard it as a valuable element in the poem's over-all message, just as we are obliged to accept the clumsiness of diction and the careless punctuation of other poems as evidence of sincerity.

It becomes, unfortunately, something of a strain to perform this manoeuvre in poem after poem, especially when it seems clear that straightforward problems of grammar have been left unsolved. The moving poem, *Comrade*, is flawed by grammatical errors. It opens:

> Once only did I sleep with you
> And sleep and love again more sweet than I
> have ever known; without an aftertaste.

To what does the word "sweet" refer? Surely the sense demands "sweetly" which would spoil the rhythm. And that semicolon looks very strange. The phrase (baffling in meaning) "without an aftertaste" hangs in mid-air like an advertising slogan. The second part of the poem begins:

> My dear, it's years between; we've grown
> up fast
> Each differently, each striving by itself.

Why "itself"? Clearly because to say "herself" or "himself" would suggest homosexuality. Were this fourteen line poem, separated into paragraphs of eight and six lines, to be the sonnet it is not, one might suspect the awkwardness to have been caused by the exigencies of rhyme, but the poem is unrhymed. Might I suggest, keeping the low-key diction, that the problem could be solved by rewriting the flawed line as "Each differently, each struggling on alone"? It's no worse than the original and is at least grammatical.

Some of the defects of Ms. Livesay's poems appear to stem from a wish to assemble the perceptions in an impressionistic manner, rather than in conventional syntax. In *"Call my People Home"* we find the lines

> We go out towards misty islands
> Of fog over the river

Jockeying for position;
Till morning steals over, sleepy,
And over our boat's side, leaning
The word comes, Set the nets!
Hiding the unannounced prayer
Resounding in the heart's corners:
May we have a high boat
And the silver salmon leaping!

Here, the unnecessary semi-colon after "position" blocks the flow of the sentence, and the absence of quotation marks slows the reader down, while the word "resounding" is surely wrong; how can anything "unannounced" resound? And why does the character already in the boat ask for a "high boat"? The word "high" is as adventitious a piece of flummery as one might hope to find. Nevertheless this long poem for radio is effective as speech; its punctuation and sometimes broken-backed syntax, are not noticeable when it is read aloud, and the succession of images and parenthetical comments produces a powerful effect upon the ear which is, in these days, less educated to detect faults of structure in spoken material than in music.

Here I find myself thinking that much of what I have noted may be the product of historical influence. When Ms. Livesay began writing the poetry audience in Canada was both sparse and uncritical; there was little incentive to polish, to revise to perfect niceties of structure and diction. Poetry itself was enough! Moreover, reviewers and readers responded more to the sentiment than to the style, and took the intent for the achievement as long as that intent fitted with the social prejudices and beliefs of the time. Thus one can, in part, forgive the appalling doggerel of some parts of Dorothy Livesay's *Depression Suite*; it has all the anger and compassion demanded by the situation in the early thirties. One can understand that the compulsion to express could override the duty to perfect the statements. The same might be said of the poem on the Spanish Civil War, *Catalonia*, and of that on Louis Riel. In all these the passion, the concern, emerges powerfully, and perhaps one should not criticize the style of an outcry, any more than one should condemn the incoherence of a keen. If we agree, however, to let our standards fall in this way, we are pandering to that very insensitivity which, in a different manifestation, causes the social ills against which we rail. If we accept a poem for its courage, its social awareness, its sentiment, and relegate considerations of artistry to a lower place, we are liable to end up by regarding Ferlinghetti as superior to Wallace Stevens, and considering a protest march as a more significant contribution to cultural health than a symphony. This is, of course, a conclusion many have now reached, perhaps without realizing that when a society judges the significance of art entirely in terms of its message and sentiment, it is in danger of establishing a tyranny of popular prejudice hardly less damaging to the collective psyche than the censorship of the totalitarian states, and, in losing all interests in mere artistry, destroying all hope for a collective insistence upon clarity of thought, orderliness of behaviour, and impartiality of justice.

Such general reflections may be regarded as being out of place in a review of a book of poems, but I feel that they may serve to explain why, in reading Dorothy Livesay's work I find myself sympathizing with, and even applauding, the honesty and courage of her statements, even as I condemn the poetry for its amateurish clumsiness and its aesthetic

imprecision. I would like to come to a different verdict, but cannot, in all conscience, do so. To be accepted as a poet of significance one must do more than mean well; one must write well.

This is true of my reading of the first two thirds of Dorothy Livesay's *Collected Poems*, always excepting the early intense and lucid lyrics from my judgment, for these are often both moving and precisely shaped. It is not however true of the book's last third, which contains the poems written since 1956 when Dorothy Livesay's *Selected Poems* appeared. After 1956 the earlier prolixity and syntactical disarray seem to have been almost entirely conquered. The punctuation remains arbitrary on occasion, but the poems have a new force and clarity, a new directness and sense of form. Consider the poem, *Widow*, of 1958-9:

> No longer any man needs me
> nor is the dark night of love
> coupled
> But the body is relentless, knows
> its need
> must satisfy itself without the seed
> must shake in dreams, fly up the stairs
> backwards.
>
> In the open box in the attic
> a head lies, set sideways.
> This head from this body is severed.

The purist might object to the juxtaposition of a voiced and a voiceless "s" in the tenth and in the eleventh line, but apart from this the poem is flawless. It is clear, passionate, balanced, and crowned by an image of magnificent power and severity. A similar strength and power is presented in the zestful poem *The Incendiary* (though its one comma is not needed), and the direct speech and vigorous tone of *Ballad of Me* is impressive. There is real economy of language here:

> Everyone expected guilt
> even I —
> the pain was this:
> to feel nothing

This poem first appeared in *The Unquiet Bed* (1967), Dorothy Livesay's most impressive collection. *Making the Poem*, utilizing an open form and owing something to the Imagist-Black Mountain tradition, is both effective and poised. The sixth and final section reads:

> Sleep is the cave of the self
> infants sleep
> Narcissus
>   in the cave of mirrors
>   sleeps
> the old
> wake early
> dream
>   rarely
> the dawn birds make
> a thankful music

Subtle, and well organized, it has purity of tone and strength of diction. In these poems images which in earlier years would have been fumbled and blurred emerge with clarity.

> your bones may melt
>   in me
> or in another woman
> the essence is
>   to catch the bird in season
> hold, hold a snowdrop
>   capped and cool
> in the cold snow
> then let it go

In this section of the *Collected Poems* the passion and the poetry fuse, and the later poems are equally deft and poised and strong. It is as if all the honesty, the sincerity, the courage, of the earlier poems have now come together with a real concern for poetry as an art. The descriptions are more vivid than before, and the technique is more assured. Indeed it seems as if the book's subtitle *The Two Seasons* could be made to refer to the

two periods 1926 to 1956 and 1956 to the present. This sudden revolution may seem strange, and yet it is not without precedent. In 1910 when W. B. Yeats was 45 years old he published *The Green Helmet* which signalized a fundamental change in his poetry and led him to the greatest of his works. In 1956 Dorothy Livesay was 47. It seems that in the middle forties some poets are rewarded for long years of service and given new powers. Be that as it may, the poetry of Dorothy Livesay in the period since 1956 entirely alters my earlier view of her stature and position. From being one who might reasonably be regarded as a worthwhile minor poet of irreproachable honesty and variable quality, who had a secure niche in one of the smaller rooms in our national hall of fame, she must now be considered a poet whose economy of language, clarity of vision, suppleness of cadence, and strong sense of form, place her well above many of her contemporaries, and lead one to hope that the second of her two seasons may prove longer than the first and that the publication of her Collected Poems may turn out to be even more premature than Yeats' *Collected Poems* of 1933.

A TILTING EQUIPOISE

Christopher Xerxes Ringrose

RALPH GUSTAFSON, *Selected Poems*. McClelland and Stewart, $5.95.

RALPH GUSTAFSON, *Theme and Variations for Sounding Brass*. Progressive Publications (Sherbrooke, Quebec), $1.00.

THE PUBLICATION of these two books of poetry by Ralph Gustafson raises the question of the effectiveness of Mr. Gustafson's very distinctive poetic tone, as well as the larger question as to what tone and approach is appropriate to the kinds of material he is handling in *Theme and Variations for Sounding Brass*, which is "dedicated to the victims" — of Prague 1968, Kent State 1970, Vietnam perennially, Quebec 1970, Biafra, Bangladesh; or even if one can talk of "tone and approach" in considering such matters.

The *Selected Poems* are taken from *Flight into Darkness* (1944), *Rivers among Rocks* (1960), *Rocky Mountain Poems* (1960), *Sift in an Hourglass* (1966) and *Ixion's Wheel* (1969). Since *Ixion's Wheel* was itself something of a "Collected Poems" of the sixties, 41 of the poems in the *Selected Poems* are making their third appearance in book form. There are some revisions here, usually to the good. To take two examples: "Mausoleum Hunting: Ravenna" (from *Sift in an Hourglass*) has been improved by the removal of the last four lines, and some laborious punning on sans cire/sincere in "The Fall of Icarus" (from *Ixion's Wheel*) has been eliminated.

Reading through the 121 selected poems makes one more than ever aware of Mr. Gustafson's recurrent themes, which were discernible in his poetry from the beginning: primarily his sense of the mysterious co-presence of life and death in the world, in the imagination, in art,

an equipoise tilting delicately towards the grave. The poet who in 1944 spoke of "The apple twixt the tombstones of my teeth" notices in 1969 Shakespeare's monument marked with a skull, and remarks that "death's above/all of us". If the concern with death and dissolution is pervasive, so too is the interest in myth and history, especially the hinterland where the two combine, and the desire to see Agamemnon, or Icarus, or Joan of Arc, or the Pharoahs in the here and now, with what they stood for persisting into the present moment. These two thematic strains obviously run parallel, and they can come together very prettily, as in "The Valley of Kings":

> They weren't far wrong:
> the body kept
> to keep the soul.
> Light falls across the Nile.
> I dip my hand
> over the felluca's edge.
> Golden! Golden!

One sees here too that sense of place which is important in many of the poems: the reacting mind before the Rockies, Ravenna or Rouen, recreating significance imaginatively — a kind of superior tourism.

It has to be said, though, that the further one pursues these themes, and the more poems one reads, the more tiresome Mr. Gustafson's verse can become. He is not a poet to read in any quantity, and one may on the face of it wonder why, for surely we have in him a resurrection of Metaphysical Wit — that seriousness without solemnity, a blending of passion, wit and erudition which modern orthodoxy presents as the highest mode to which we can aspire. But this sophistication is embodied in a peculiar tone — a somewhat prissy, heavily mannered tone — which begins to grate on one.

To progress through the *Selected Poems* is to come with disturbing regularity on those affected, mannered phrases: "If a man goes through the crust his leg melts./I have seen this thing happen", "Aspects of Some Forsythia Branches", "Aphrodite's laugh was certain/ (These are reliable reports)", "The second time I shuddered with love,/ (You remember, we were so placed/ Passion was visual:", "Ahead, we could see/What choice was. There was/No parable in it.", "I took it from her,/My finger lashed with the stuff"; or the pair of brusque opening lines: "There was a care needed; stones/On the path could break the ankle", "A fire should be made also/To stare at". The mannerism is present too in the prefatory note: "If the music was not in jeopardy, for the sake of exactness I have occasionally altered a word or a phrase". The desire not to put "the music in jeopardy" issues in the careful, "musical" deployment of consonant and vowel, as in the alliteration of "Prelude 2", with its description of Pan:

> Slant eyes thwart
> The staggering straw
> Sweet still with the wet of water
> Where one
> Hoof bubbles the tilted stream.

But "the music" sounds within a highly self-conscious verse whose movement is oblique and choppy. A good deal of the foregoing may derive from Mr. Gustafson's evident admiration for Browning; often he speaks like a close relative of Bishop Blougram, and Browning's influence comes out strongly in the dramatic monologue "Michelangelo Looks Up Not Sleeping: The Duomo Workyard, Florence."

This mannered tone tends in the poems of the fifties and sixties (and especially

the more recent ones) to be linked to a mordant jocosity; in comparison the earlier poems from *Flight into Darkness* are more dense and intense, determinedly dislocated in their syntax, as in "Lyric Sarcastic", which is very much of the *Preview/First Statement* era of Canadian poetry:

> What brink and bastion bound can make
> Against the common sea delays
> Of dart and dazzle, crumple rake
> Of sun off ocean's cornice, rays?

The somewhat shapeless accumulation of wit which forms this and other poems from *Flight into Darkness* ("Biography", "Idyll for a Fool", "Ultimatum", "Flight into Darkness") tends to give way later in his career to meditations sparked by specific places or incidents — as in his witty consternation "On the Top of Milan Cathedral", where Cokes from a red refrigerator compete with "the Virgin Mary and Christ holding/Open like a miraculous cardiac his bleeding/Heart". But the pitfall of this material is the obvious one: that Mr. Gustafson becomes our urbane and allusive tour guide, having interesting thoughts on everything from the Trevi fountain to mosaics in Istanbul, from the Vieux Marché at Rouen to Cairo Museum, Mount Revelstoke to Franz Liszt's grave, the fall of Icarus to Dachau seen from a train window.

The tone of the poetry is, as I said, distinctive, but one senses a degree of strain when it is asked to cope with, say, the elegy for "S.S.R., Lost at Sea" from *Flight into Darkness*, where the language seems too fussily self-conscious for the subject. I am not suggesting that the subject calls for the unleashing of the floodgates of grief, but here as elsewhere too much seems written with the eventual

excavations of practical criticism in mind — in particular the guiding metaphor which opens and closes the poem:

> What heave of grapnels will resurrect the fabric
> Of him, oceans drag, whereof he died,
> Drowning sheer fathoms down, liquid to grab on —
> . . . .
> O let the heart's tough riggings salvage him,
> Only whose lengths can grapple with these dead.

The comparison may be unfair, but I cannot help thinking here of the noble simplicity of Wilfred Owen at the end of a poem with a similar theme: "And each slow dusk a drawing-down of blinds" — the inadequacy of the gesture, and by implication the poem, in the face of grief.

Which brings me to ***Theme and Variations for Sounding Brass***, which, in view of my reaction to the *Selected Poems*, strikes me as the most interesting and difficult project Mr. Gustafson could have undertaken. The attempt to write poetry about the sufferings and violence of Bangladesh and Prague, America and Canada, is difficult enough by any standard, but for a poet of Mr. Gustafson's particular manner and characteristic approach the problems are very great. This is not to suggest that the writing of "social poetry" (if we must call it that) involves some spurious technique of impersonal reportage; Mr. Gustafson has rightly seen that it has in fact to keep before us the individual reacting mind. The poems in this booklet are full of indignation, but eventually they centre around the difficulty of responding humanely to what our cameramen bring us; they are also about the language we apply to violence, and about the moral obligation to be compassionate. But compassion before the bland eye of television can be an impertinence, and as Mr. Gustafson says in the last lines of his final poem, "The trouble is there is too/Much death for compassion". Furthermore, photographs of the suffering or dead can become "A bunch/Of shots for a text".

Well, Mr. Gustafson has specialized for some years in "shots for a text", the conversion of mythic and historical material to sardonic wit — Joan of Arc burns like "any haunch/ of meat bought by a housewife/ in the marketstall", Savonarola "set himself alight", and Agamemnon home from the wars, "Silence, silence beyond that door" — we have them all in the *Selected Poems*, alongside the assertion that "Grief's love's origin". But the insouciant sophistication obviously has to give way here, as he says in speaking of the deaths at Kent State:

> I slip
> From parable, sarcastic with
> Didactics O to plain
> Statement! These four are dead,

But even plain statement won't wholly serve our purpose, as Mr. Gustafson goes on to reflect in the third section, "And Still These Deaths Are Ours", which is an examination of three heartbreaking photographs from East Pakistan of the drowned, the dying and the suffering. At first sight they seem far from the condensation and impersonality of myth — the clean evidence of an Icarus or Minotaur — but even in the photographs the suffering becomes half present, half mythical, our response more dutiful than spontaneous. The poet wants to hold on to the real, almost as expiation, but . . . "a bunch/ Of shots for a text. . . . We forget. Already we have forgotten."

To go on making careful poems in the face of it all is perhaps to hoist a drawbridge of aestheticism, and one senses

that Mr. Gustafson is unsure whether to remain in control, or let go of his normal lapidary style in the interests of "sincerity". He can still be inappropriately fussy, annotating a pun on "mordent", but one hears something new in the indignation at the pious rhetoric of the Quebec revolutionaries:

> Murderers and advocates of murderers
> As innocents
> Attend the courts,
> Their innocence
> The virtuous mutilation
> The necessary brains
> spilled on the ignorant street

While the booklet as a whole is perhaps something less than a success, it is a valiant attempt on difficult material; one's final impression is of a justifiable bewilderment before the awful facts.

TERRITORIES ENCLOSED BY SINGING

Germaine Warkentin

W. H. NEW, *Articulating West: Essays on Purpose and Form in Modern Canadian Literature.* new press. $7.50.

IN INDIAN BELIEF, Anna Jameson noted in 1837, the West is the oldest of the spirits that inhabit the cardinal points of the compass; indeed, he is the father of all the others. The newer peoples of North America brought with them a different concept of "west". Built into the mystique of European culture is the idea that the west embodies the chaotic, the non-human, the unarticulated. Spenser's history of Britain in Book II of *The Faerie Queene* begins:

> The land, which warlike Britons now possesse,
> And therein have their mightie empire raysd,
> In antique times was salvage wildernesse,
> Unpeopled, unmanurd, unprov'd, unpraysd.
> (*F.Q.* II, x, 5)

Three and a half centuries later, contemplating the massive indifference of one of the great Manitoba lakes, Margaret Laurence's Vanessa McLeod feels the same *frisson*:

> No human word could be applied. The lake was not lonely or untamed. These words relate to people, and there was nothing of people here. There was no feeling about the place. It existed in some world in which man was not yet born.

Like the Amerindians, Western Europeans (the name is full of paradox) spiritualized their directions. As W. H. New reminds us in his stimulating collection of essays, *Articulating West*, "the north is the region of the intellect, the south of the senses, the west the domain of the demons, the east of the gods." This was not a static situation, of course. Knowledge moved, and because it seemed godlike, its movement was always from east to west, out of the eastern seat of ancient wisdom into the realm of the demons, conquering fear and turning chaos into order, so that what before was non-human became invested with our lives and, like us, became articulate. And the process was teleological; its aim was the

achievement of the perfectly articulate community, where men created the good state as they realized their most specifically human endowment, the use of language.

Whether in the classical formulation of the levels of style, or in the post-Renaissance sense of the "purely literary", the instrument of this movement was always the idea that some literature is more appropriate than others for articulating this purpose, that some authors are truly masters, that there exists in fact a "great tradition" which is central to man's effort to cultivate himself. Yet against this struggles the power of "west" itself. Wallace Stevens' intrepid traveller is

> ... studious of a self possessing him,
> That was not in him in the crusty town
> From which he sailed.

As he moves west, the centre of his reality moves with him, and he knows

> The man in Georgia walking among pines
> Should be pine-spokesman.

And then of course there is the dread reality of the social achievement itself, the bitter colonial struggle. George MacDonald Fraser's Flashman, charging into an Afghan citadel (in the east, of course, but let it pass), mutters proudly to himself "To hell with these blackamoors — we are Englishmen!"

New's collection of essays on "purpose and form in modern Canadian literature" takes us away from the achieved perfection of the classical dream of "territories enclosed by singing" into an exploration of the process of articulating the new land itself. Thus, though he seeks the shaping myths of our community's self-knowledge, his models are less in Frye's eternal archetypes than in Eliade's profound sense of the force of the temporal. And his task is made harder yet because it is shadowed by the contemporary fear that words are no longer merely difficult, but impossible — indeed, by a pervading vision of the whole cosmos as "west".

The essays collected here first appeared in journals particularly concerned with literary life on the edge of the great tradition: *Canadian Literature, The Journal of Commonwealth Literature, Poetry Australia*, and others. The earliest (1963) is on W. O. Mitchell; most of the others have been written since 1967. New's preoccupation is with the very contemporary; though there are essays on Niven, Pratt, and Carol Coates Cassidy, most of the rest are on writers who are still on the scene or, like Malcolm Lowry, somehow still ahead of us. Since every critic is in a sense shaped by the people he works on, readers can use these essays to sketch New's growth as a critic from his early essay on the transition from childhood to maturity in the novels of W. O. Mitchell, through his work on MacLennan, Laurence, Lowry, Wilson, Richler, Avison, and Godfrey. And we can sense some of the areas he has still to explore in the absence of studies of Grove, Leacock, Callaghan, Davies, and Atwood. (There is some attention to French-Canadian literature, but this is basically a book about English-Canadian writing, and no guesses are hazarded as to the relationships between them.) The promise that this growth is in store for us is heralded in the splendid concluding essay on Earle Birney as "spiritual geographer" which attracted so much attention when it appeared in the *Canadian Forum* last fall, and was in fact especially written for this book. But that growth is still to take place. The sum

effect of *Articulating West* is of a diversity of matter only partially explicated, and of a set of possibilities searching for a critical method to give them authority.

The essays in *Articulating West* are not organized chronologically. Rather, they offer us three ways of getting at what is, despite the independent nature of each piece, a central argument. The first way is through the essays themselves, in which we can study New's critical strategies at work. Second, there is a compact, highly allusive introduction which begins to build a shape out of these pieces. Third, there are the thematic sections in which the essays have been grouped, and which have an important role in working out the significance of the introduction.

In the earliest stratum, the individual essays, New functions both as scholar and critic. As scholar he courageously begins his chapter on Avison with an early undistinguished poem that startles one into realizing the extent of this poet's growth. Elsewhere he reminds us of Pratt's editorials in *Canadian Poetry Magazine*, and illuminates the meteorological implications of the title *Barometer Rising*. But as a critic, he is clearly testing his own possibilities, and the results, while definitely thought-provoking, are not always even. They range from the numbing seriousness and structural disunity of "Carol Coates Cassidy and the Form Dispute" (1971), through a patient and earnestly impersonal exegesis of the novels of Frederick Niven (1967), to a truly sensitive and knowledgeable discussion of Lowry's *October Ferry to Gabriola*, (1972), a posthumous novel by a writer with whom, as his excellent short book on Lowry indicates, New is particularly sympathetic. In general, New is most comfortable in an impersonal analytic mode; even his most sensitive and challenging essays tend to evade the problem of evaluation, or to peter out in snobbish and perfunctory terminal verdicts. Yet his impersonality functioning at its best can lead to truly evaluative statements; behind the tragic failure of *Return of the Sphinx*, for example, he unerringly discerns the excellences that might have made it an extraordinary novel.

Paradoxically, though New writes more often about fiction, his critical method seems primarily shaped by his experience of poetry. As the title of the book above shows, he is fascinated with language, and it is its complex nuances and possible ambiguities that chiefly in-

SEX & DEATH
Al Purdy

"Behind me in the mountain pass another man
stumbles among rocks and stars
he knows about me and I know about him
we plan to get together sometime
then have a word with you"

McCLELLAND & STEWART / *The Canadian Publishers*
At Good Bookstores Everywhere $6.95 cl. $3.50 pa.

terest him. Thus, despite his stated interest in form, he tends to miscalculate effects created in the way a novel is structured. His treatment of the ending of Ross's *As For Me and My House* is a case in point; he contends that its ambiguity is a deliberately created effect, though there is room to argue that the structure of the work perhaps directs us into an ambiguity which is not the result of the characters' confrontation with experience, but of Ross's own technical problem in telling us about it. Another instance is afforded by his early reading of the ending of *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz,* which suggests that the novel ends in a comic triumph; reservations in a couple of later pieces imply New may have concluded that this ending is a darker one than he had thought. Moving within the large structure of Pratt's poem *Towards the Last Spike,* he is never at home; his method shines with Birney and Avison, where language and form can both be controlled in a smaller space.

It is in the terse, almost aphoristic introduction he has recently built on these diverse elements that New establishes the meaning he has found in the process by which our unknown "west" has been given voice and language. Full of tantalizing brief references to works not treated in the essays, it attempts to weave the threads of modern Canadian literature into a single fabric that interprets the classical problem of "articulation". His argument is that Canada's basic regional identities, "east" and "west", are tensely opposed, yet only loosely tied to their geographical meanings. But we persist in trying to use them as if they signified something exact. In actuality, he writes,

> The physical realities represented by "East" and "West" shift as the *ideas* of "East" and "West" alter, and the interaction between knowledge and imagination that affects this process of change also characterizes the method by which a writer wrestles life into an artistic form. To speak the language of "West" is not to be merely regional in bias, therefore, but to articulate the tension between order and disorder, myth and reality, that underlies Canadian writing.

This is a huge project. New has clearly taken on not merely our bedevilling myth of wilderness, with its psychic and social implications, but the raging dispute over the relationship of artistic form and reality as well. As he gamely admits towards the end of his introduction,

> The problem has not simply been one of distinguishing between appearance and reality, or between life and form, but also one of explaining the compulsions of a wilderness myth without either defining it or surrendering to it.

Courageous as this stance is, it is a limited one, and its limitations emerge from the stress on tension and ambiguity in the critical method of individual essays, and from New's related hostility to the idea of "defining". "Perfect order," he muses, "seems alien to the Canadian imagination, steeped in the ambivalences of reality and the limitations of art." The attempt to rescue language and create it anew thus takes place within a set of imaginative possibilities in which such a project can hardly be envisioned.

New's solution is on one hand to reject naive realism with its contempt for the visionary element in art, and on the other hand to repudiate just as firmly the concentration on pure form that he feels leads to devitalized convention. For New, the poetry is not in the poem, which he sees as "history's artifact, already behind the poet, who has moved on"; it is rather

in the *process* of making poems, the experience of seeing and creating that new world. He distinguishes in the modern period two stages in this movement towards process, the first composed of the writers from Leacock to MacLennan, who faced the elementary problem of how to develop a language of art that could articulate "place" with authority, and second the writers from Klein to Godfrey who take up the exploration of language itself, in the process transforming "the frontier from a physical to a metaphysical place" and making it possible to explore the wilderness within us, as well as that without. This is very valuable, for New is identifying a crucial phase in the development of any Western literature: the turning of what begins as mere "place" into a country of the imagination, and he points to the vital role of poetic language in creating that development.

Yet there are two difficulties here. The first relates to the question of form. New tries very hard by focussing on our built-in duality not to abolish the security of "east". But by distrusting form, and abandoning the poem as artifact, he seems to cut us off from preserving a continuous dialogue with "east", one that is vital to the audience, even if the poet can somehow set it aside as he constantly gives new realization to his art. Form is a level of reality in itself, full of its own energy and history. And as a member of the audience, I cannot leave the poem as artifact behind, for it will keep on returning to talk to me, whether I want it to or not. The audience too has its poem to make, one built on these artifacts, and held communally.

On the second question, that of purpose, New is more elusive and exploratory, and the reason perhaps is that his real argument about purpose is contained less in the introduction than in the sections into which the book is organized. At the beginning are those essays (not a very satisfactory lot, as it turns out) which attempt to deal with the creating of a language of myth out of such diverse elements as Niven's sense of exile or Cassidy's inadequate struggle with the relationship between form and matter. New's view is that when these constituent elements of psychic experience give birth to the created work, the process is fundamentally a technical one: "the unbounded landscape becomes what it is by the way it is made." The next section is devoted to the conflict between purpose and form, to the problem of ordering this reality so we can talk about it, and the ironies that seem to be the result. "Ending the Liberal Pageant", which follows, gathers a set of essays especially concerned with problems of a colonial society emerging not into the revolutionary confidence which New detects in *Barometer Rising*, but into the chaos of the sixties, the "disappointed decade".

At the end of the Liberal pageant, New concludes, "the ironies are dark, the humour is brittle, and any affirmations are a little wistful in an uncertain world." "Developing the Textures of Language" takes us beyond this despair into what New hopes will be a fresh way of locating the world through a reinvention of the poetic function so radical that it may even leave the "reality" of the language completely behind. What is created as a result New in the final section characterises (in a phrase drawn from Birney) as a "soundless fugue". The image is terrifying: profoundly

formal, yet somehow with the desperation of Munch's great picture "The Cry". In its light, one begins to conceive of our evolving tradition as a kind of ectoplasmic fabric shivering and re-forming in the cold ether of the modern cosmos with a ghost-like tenacity of purpose, yet without sound. In articulating our west, we have arrived not at the timeless creative dialogue between form and matter, but at silence.

"My work consists of two parts," wrote Wittgenstein to a friend, "the one presented here plus all that I have *not* written." It is in the final section of *Articulating West* that New goes beyond the limitations of his own view, and seems to suggest the shape of a book he has yet to write. Here he gathers, whether consciously or not, the articles on those seminal masters of Canadian literature on whom he has so far tested himself: Lowry, Laurence, Godfrey, Avison, and Birney. Each of these essays seems focussed on a different attempt to find an exit from soundlessness: in Birney's sense of spiritual progression, in Lowry's perfect circle of the angelic and demonic, in Avison's discovery of the poet's capacity to celebrate, in Godfrey's *The New Ancestors*, where "the end of the visionary African search is a generative commitment to social identity too." New recognizes that it is in the "historical anguish" of this confrontation between form and purpose that art is created. But as the shape he had given to his own book clearly suggests, the result is not a soundless "process" that leaves the reality of language behind, but something infinitely more natural and historic: the dynamic creation of the voice of a community from the things "made" by the poet as he works, then known and treasured by those who listen to him.

Surveying under New's guidance the range of these writers' achievements, one at length senses a possible third stage in the historical evolution he has described earlier. For these are the writers of the future — though one of them has been dead for sixteen years — and they are involved in a task sketched out here, but somehow not yet recognized. They have passed beyond our preoccupation of the past twenty years — exploring the textures of language — and taken up another: teaching us how to use it. One closes *The Stone Angel* or *The New Ancestors* (one profoundly traditional, the other revolutionary) knowing that after their achievement, it is no longer possible to write English-Canadian fiction in the old way, that in a dialogue with these "artifacts", one has been brought beyond one's limits, and set free on the frontier of art. At the farthest edge of "west", we come to a new and hopeful relationship with "east", and the walls of the garrison fall away at last. That's worth crossing seas to find. One closes *Articulating West* feeling that its interest arises in being able to lead us up to this frontier, but that in his fixation on duality and ambiguity, with his belief that poetry can no longer be anything but process, New has not yet perfectly articulated the powerful momentum of his own thesis. Whether he is the Moses of our little exodus, or perhaps its Joshua, it will be exciting to see.

SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST

Herbert Rosengarten

HAROLD HORWOOD, *White Eskimo: a Novel of Labrador*. Doubleday.
JOHN BUELL, *The Shrewsdale Exit*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
JOY FIELDING, *The Best of Friends*. Longmans.

MARGARET ATWOOD'S recent survey of Canadian literature has given fashionable prominence to the theme of survival, the grim struggle man wages against the vast and hostile land around him. The instinct to survive must be a strong element in any frontier society; and Harold Horwood's book *White Eskimo*, with its emphasis on the physical hardships of life in the remote ice-lands of Labrador, fits neatly into the category distinguished by Ms. Atwood. The novel's central figure is a white adventurer called Esau Gillingham, who appears to the Eskimos to be gifted with magical powers because of his skill as a hunter and trapper. He lives with the Eskimos, takes one of their daughters as his wife, and seeks to revive their pride in their ancient heritage. But his dreams crumble when Abel, his Eskimo "song-brother," is shot, in circumstances strongly pointing to Gillingham himself as the murderer; and he is charged with the killing. On his release from prison, he returns to Labrador, renews his epic hunting expeditions, and eventually disappears on a journey to the Land of the Dividing of the Waters, an almost unchartered region in the interior.

As a narrative of action and adventure, *White Eskimo* is excellent; Mr. Horwood can spin a good yarn, and his descriptions of dangerous journeys through a hard land are dramatic and convincing. But the author is not content to present merely a good story; like Conrad, whose presence hovers over this book (and who is once mentioned by name), Mr. Horwood wants to make his tale serve deeper purposes. He gives it the quality of myth by associating his hero with Gilgamesh, god-hero of the ancient Assyrian epic; the preface acknowledges the author's debt "to the scholars who first deciphered the Sumerian cuneiform"; and in case the reader should miss the parallel, the characters who narrate Gillingham's history make an explicit comparison. The reader may feel that the author's signals here are somewhat heavy-handed, and not altogether necessary; for it is obvious enough from the narrative that Gillingham is intended to appear as a god-like figure, whose visions are not imaginary, whose mystic powers will enable him to lead his chosen people to a new greatness. The Eskimos regard him as the White Spirit, endowed with immortality and supernatural powers; and by the end of the book, the reader is meant to feel that such worship is not misplaced. But Gillingham's character is an uncomfortable mixture of nobility and brashness, the mighty and the mundane; and his heroic image is not enhanced by such expressions of his views as his contemptuous dismissal of the "white racist government in St. John's," or his denunciation of Robert Browning:

"Stick a braggart like Browning down in the hills above Okak Bay and he'd be dead by sunset." Though Gillingham speaks at other times with a more appropriate elevation, one can't help feeling that this idol has feet of clay; and the author's attempts to give Gillingham a spiritual dimension make his character's aspirations seem pretentious rather than divine.

As if the stone tablets of Gilgamesh were not enough to weigh the story down, the author intersperses passages of historical explanation or social criticism, on such subjects as the contribution made by the Hudson's Bay Company to the opening-up of the land, the impact of the missions on native life, or the power-seeking by a few individuals under the veil of philanthropy. Such passages are presented in the context of conversations between the characters; but they are usually sensed as intrusions, as expressions of authorial opinion and experience, rather than as ideas emerging from the action itself. It is part of Mr. Horwood's purpose to show the deleterious effect of white law and religion upon the once-rich life of the Eskimo; and where this cannot be dramatized, it is simply stated. That Mr. Horwood loves Labrador and its people, and is concerned for their survival, is evident on every page; but in his zeal to argue their case, his novel sometimes becomes a tract, the story giving way to polemic.

John Buell's novel *The Shrewsdale Exit* involves survival too, but at a grimmer level, for the forces to be overcome here are within men themselves, and the obstacles more daunting than the hazards of an Arctic winter. In a cool, almost reportorial style, Mr. Buell recounts the attack by a motorcycle gang on a vacationing family, in which the husband is beaten unconscious, and his wife and daughter are raped and brutally slaughtered. Joe Grant seeks vengeance: when the police investigation falters for lack of evidence, he takes matters into his own hands, hunts down the murderers, and tries to shoot them. The judge who sends him to prison draws the obvious moral: the law exists "to maintain in society an order whereby such penalties as befit crimes will be imposed by law and not by individuals, however justifiably angry." But Joe is unconvinced: he escapes from prison, goes into hiding, and waits his opportunity to strike again.

The dilemma presented here is a familiar one, though at first sight it seems to admit of a quick solution. The reader's sympathies are all with Joe: his life has no purpose without his family, and the only meaningful course left open to him, the only way of asserting his very existence, seems to be to punish those who were guilty of the crime. But Mr. Buell does not allow us to be blinded by emotional logic; for he shows how, in pursuing the killers, Joe becomes as brutal, calculating and inhuman as they are. To recover his humanity, Joe must come to terms with life, and recognize the laws which govern natural process as well as personal relationships; and in the last part of the novel he takes the "Shrewsdale exit," a road leading away from the main highway to a rural community, where he lives for some weeks as a farmhand. He still plans revenge; but imperceptibly he is changing. Finally Joe learns that one of the killers is dead, the others close to arrest by the police: the urge for vengeance dies, and he is ready to pick up his life again.

This is an interesting and provocative

novel, working at the level of moral fable as well as of action and suspense. The author's intention is to take us beyond the external manifestations of violence to the effects of such violence upon an ordinary, "decent" member of society, who becomes tainted by the very evil he wishes to destroy — not a new theme, certainly, but handled here with subtlety and understatement. The emphasis on the healing powers of nature may, however, seem an oversimplification of the issues raised by Joe's experience; one might ask, for instance, whether his urge for revenge would have disappeared as it did, had the murderers of his wife and child remained indefinitely beyond the grasp of the law. In the final analysis Joe survives only by accepting the system which, for a time, had turned him into a cold-blooded killer and a convict; but Mr. Buell does not ask us to consider whether Joe's acceptance is a fair price to pay for survival.

A nature cure might well be the answer to the heroine's problems in Joy Fielding's book *The Best of Friends*, if only to rescue her from the hothouse atmosphere of the bedroom. Caroline Beacon is a neurotic young woman who takes refuge from a disastrous marriage in a dependent relationship with Cathy, a dynamic and successful girl whose self-confidence is reassuring to the somewhat timid Caroline. Caroline's story is told through a mixture of flashbacks, interior monologues, and conversations with her psychiatrist; and as the tale of her hu-

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miliations in marriage and the subsequent friendship with Cathy unfolds, it emerges that Cathy is a creature of Caroline's imagination, invented to remove her sense of guilt and failure about her sexual life in general and an abortion in particular. Miss Fielding has constructed a neat little story; and with a technical skill that is praiseworthy in a first novel, she manages to hold back the truth about Caroline's mental state until late in the plot (though when the psychiatrist does pierce the mystery, he has the air of a magician producing a rabbit from his hat).

Miss Fielding's intention is evidently to show how conventional social pressures can inhibit or pervert our sense of ourselves: Caroline is driven into marriage because of an unwanted pregnancy, then into a psychotic state because she cannot shoulder the burden of guilt associated with abortion. But while the psychological basis of the action is convincing enough, it does not save the novel from the charge of superficiality, for the serious questions raised by Caroline's experience are dealt with rather perfunctorily, while the author spends a great deal of time regaling us with Caroline's sexual experiences, oral, anal, and miscellaneous. Swear-words and sexual athletics are undoubtedly a means of defining character, but here the means sometimes becomes the end; Caroline's character remains as imperfectly-realised and two-dimensional as the caricatures of her nice, middle-class family or her brutal, selfish husband. This is not to deny the book a degree of realism in its depiction of human relationships: people do treat each other as objects, to be used for personal satisfaction; and survival at this level is as tough as anything Mr. Horwood's Eskimo trappers have to face. But one cannot help feeling that a good blast of Arctic air would do more for Caroline than all her visits to the psychiatrist.

BEHIND THE AVANT GARDE

Anthony Appenzell

MATTHEW EDEN, *Conquest before Autumn*. Longmans Canada. $7.75.
JIM WILLER, *Paramind*. McClelland & Stewart. $7.75.
WAYLAND DREW, *The Wabeno Feast*. Anansi. $7.95.
THOMAS YORK, *We, the Wilderness*. McGraw Hill-Ryerson. $6.95.
KENT THOMPSON, *The Tenants were Corrie and Tennie*. Macmillan. $6.95.

FIVE NOVELS picked out of a recent season — all by Canadians, all but one set in Canada, and all but one written in what one can only call Experimentalesque. That is to say, they dislocate time sequences, mingle the fantastic and the realistic, and bleed actuality into illusion, as the fictional mode now expects; there is little manipulation of language, and it is obvious that — if the writers have read their Joyce — they have recognized his route as a

one-way, one-time street. There is nothing in them, in formal terms, so novel as the fiction which Anansi published two or three years back during the brief lifetime of Spiderline editions; these are the second rank of the movement, willing to occupy the ground won by the avant garde but not to take avant garde risks.

In the same way, the ideas these writers express are not especially original; they are concerned with such topical matters as the perils of computerization, as the threat of pollution and the wasteful use of resources, as the alienation of modern man, as the Indian seen as a sacrificial and sacrificed priest of life according to nature.

Only one of the five novels does not make use of any of these favourite topics of Canadian writers in the 1970s. It is the least well written and the least mentally provocative: *Conquest before Autumn* by Matthew Eden. I mention it partly because it belongs to a genre rarely attempted by Canadians — the thriller — and partly because it displays a political naiveté which Canadians once possessed to a high degree, but which one hopes is no longer typical. *Conquest before Autumn* in fact develops a cold war plot of a former American minister (with secrets) kidnapped by the Russians; the problem is solved when CIA men (yes, Mr. Eden can still make heroes of them!) retaliate by kidnapping a Russian minister and negotiating a barter. Mr. Eden is Canadian born and lives in Montreal; these days it is rare to encounter a Canadian writer who identifies himself so closely with American attitudes. But there is no need to labour the nationalist point; *Conquest before Autumn* is a dull thriller even in its own terms, pedestrian in pace and all-too-obvious in denouement. My view that there are no good Canadian thriller writers remains unshaken; we are neither as actively experienced in violence as the Americans nor as ritually involved in conspiracy and murder as the British.

Paramind is also an unusual kind of novel for a Canadian to write; unlike *Conquest before Autumn*, it is a good example of its genre, which is science-fiction-cum-dystopia. Though there have been quite a number of actual experimental Utopian colonies on Canadian soil, we have — as George Woodcock remarked in *The Rejection of Politics* — been singularly unproductive in literary utopias or anti-utopias; de Mille's *A Strange Manuscript found in a Copper Cylinder* remains virtually alone unless, as Woodcock does, one finds a disguised utopianism the most significant element in the work of Marshall McLuhan.

Jim Willer, the sculptor author of *Paramind*, has obviously read McLuhan with attention; he has equally obviously, as a contemporary artist, listened to the unthinking enthusiasm with which the devotees of intermedial art have talked of modern electronic developments; he has considered these matters with alarm, and he has produced a novel, set largely in his own Vancouver in the 21st century, which chronicles the eventual triumph of the Machine over Man.

It is not a new theme or a new kind of plot, and most of the basic ideas Willer advances can be found in one shape or another in classic anti-Utopian writings, such as Forster's "The Machine Stops", Zamiatin's *We*, Huxley's *Brave New World* and Orwell's *1984*. Willer has obviously read so widely — he is very adept

in the language of modern science and pseudo-science — that one cannot doubt these works were among his models. Indeed, as well as sharing with them in the general attack on the increasing penetration by political and economic corporations into human privacy, and on the consequent development of means to condition thought and adapt men to follow the will of the state, *Paramind* echoes specific elements of these novels. Like the people of "The Machine Stops", the majority of the population of Willer's New World has already become dependent on a managed environment which is virtually a great machine. As in *Brave New World* and *1984* — and in Wells's *A Modern Utopia* — this population is divided into castes of rulers and ruled, in *Paramind's* case the Progs, who form the technocratic managing caste, and the Sensates, who, like the proles in *1984*, are allowed to follow their own life of controlled leisure; as in *Brave New World* pleasure — derived largely from sex and drugs — is an important element in disciplining the population, and neurological adjustments rather than pain are used to eliminate the inclination to rebel.

I note these echoes merely to show how firmly Willer participates in his tradition and is aware of it; he restates in terms of the seventies the problems which the earlier dystopians stated in terms of their particular decades, and in this kind of cautionary task repetition and revision are both necessary. Willer fulfils the role of reviser with wit and a good deal of natural eloquence, so that his book is freshly inventive in descriptive detail as well as up-to-date in providing a perspective related to that of the science fictioneers who in recent decades have tended to move into dystopian territory. The climax of *Paramind* in fact owes more to a strain of science fiction stemming from Karel Capek than to such essentially political books as *1984*. Basing his conclusion on an intelligent development of the text — "Wherever Matter is, you will find Mind — latent or manifest" — Willer shows Computer 27 transforming itself into Paramind, capable of a level of independent thought higher than that of man. *Paramind*, as all novels of warning must be, is pessimistic in its denouement; Kasgar, the creator of C.27, realizes its powers too late, and is killed by his own creation before he can destroy it. Like Forster, Zamiatin, Huxley, Orwell, all the great dystopians, Willer gives us no fictional hope; his intent is clearly didactic and magical — to enact the tragedy symbolically in the hope that thus men may be led to avoid it.

A similar didactic motive partly inspires Wayland Drew's *The Wabeno Feast*. Drew has already written a great deal journalistically on the threats posed by technological development and human greed to the environment and hence to man himself. *The Wabeno Feast* is a restatement in quasi-mythical form of these arguments. It is in part a futurist novel, but more emphatically than *Paramind* it shapes links between past, present and future. Drew, like Orwell, sees no need to evoke a nightmare of domination by irresponsible scientists and parahuman machines; he believes we will never get as far as that, since the breakdown of technological civilization long before it reaches its theoretical peak is inevitable owing to the proximate exhaustion of world resources.

Essentially, Drew sees modern man as faced with a dilemma which up to now he has not solved and which indeed he may be incapable of solving. It lies in the division that has existed in the minds of men since classical times between Nature and Reason. To live only by Reason leads to the technological hell; to live only by Nature presupposes a resolute refusal of anything but the basic techniques of a man working with his hands and the natural materials that are immediately available. Even the desire to find a middle way may be seen as perverse, for, as the Indian chief is made to say in the interpolated diary of an eighteenth century fur trader, "If a man were sane, he would have no need to reconcile these two!"

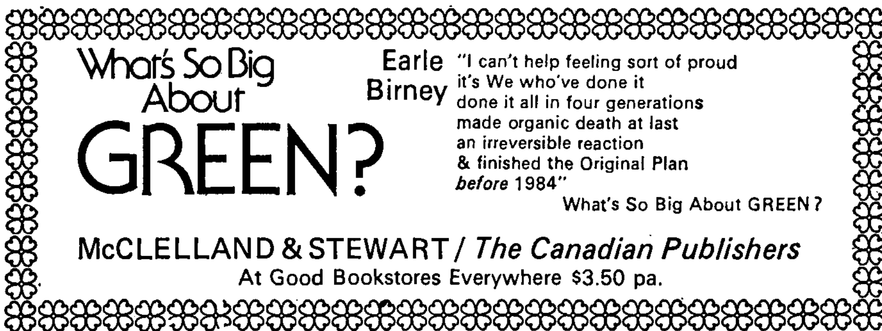
The wabeno feast of the title is a ceremony of destruction and self-mortification performed by a sect of Indian shamans whom McKay, the fur trader, encounters on his journey into the *pays d'en haut*. The evil celebrations of this cult seem to spring from a collective madness like that which Drew sees afflicting modern man and leading out of the careless world of mid-twentieth century boyhood in which the leading characters begin, into the twilight where power failures, failures of supplies, social disorders, all presage the doom of civilization, as men flee into the cities and out again, and only one man and his woman return to the wilderness that can regenerate itself and them. The dislocation of our world is mirrored in the dislocation of the novel, moving erratically — within a general drift towards destruction — from time to time and from character to character.

Books like *Paramind* and *The Wabeno Feast* demonstrate that the social preoccupations of modern writers, while as insistent as they ever were in the thirties, are less politically sectarian and also less constrained to a quasi-realistic pattern than the fiction produced in the period when rebellion was dominated by Marxist ideologies and was expected to find its expression through that bastard style known as Socialist Realism. Undoubtedly concern for the Indian peoples of Canada, divided from a significant past of their own, unable to shift their minds completely into the white man's world, is one of the dominant elements in Thomas Yorke's gauchely titled *We, the Wilderness*. Essentially, this is the story of the twentieth century consequences of nineteenth century attempts to reshape Indians into Victorian Anglicans. The village where the novel is set was converted by a missionary whose story, is not his character, closely resembles that of the celebrated William Duncan of Metlakatla, and what we see, through the eyes of the present Indian inhabitants and of the white doctor who is the old missionary's son, is the way in which what the Victorians considered the gift of life eternal has in fact been a gift of mortality, the succession of suicides paralleling the death in life, the sheer accidie, that is the fate of a people whose communal existence has lost its wholeness and hence its meaning.

We, the Wilderness, is a novel of minor but genuine merit; Thomas Yorke shows a lyrical sensibility and a sense of mythopoeic power which one would like to see developing.

Minor but genuine merit would also seem to characterize Kent Thompson's *The Tenants were Corrie and Tennie*. Here the social elements are peripheral, centred mainly on Canadian-American

love-hatred, and this fragile tale of a schoolmaster's moral collapse when he buys a duplex and becomes a landlord emotionally involved with his tenants, is mainly interesting as a wry and at times very amusing fantasy on the ways in which an attempt to retreat from the obligations of the real world can merely enmesh one in the equally confining webs of illusion.



books in review

TELEGRAMS AND ANGER

BRIAN MOORE, *Catholics.* McClelland and Stewart. $4.95.

HUGH HOOD, *You Cant Get There From Here.* Oberon. $3.95.

ONE IS INSTINCTIVELY HOPEFUL that political novels will be revealing. The fact that they discuss public issues entails an immediate expectation of significance or profundity. Yet for all this superficial promise, there are remarkably few political novels which can in fact make any claim to profundity. Without imaginative genius their impact normally depends on recognition or identification. The reader either sees the analogy between fictional and real events or else recognizes that in the workings of the novel the inner mechanism of political institutions is being revealed by one who really knows. In the best political fiction, however, there is paradoxically little interest in the working of political institutions *per se.* The nature of authority, the faithful interlocking of public and private worlds, the hollowness at the core of the theoretician, these classic themes derive their imaginative hold on a reader from the clarity and perception with which the private world is presented. In works as varied as Shakespeare's history plays and Conrad's novels, it is the wholeness with which the characters have been created that conditions our understanding of the political issues in which they are publicly trapped. Even Orwell's political fiction is at its best when he himself or his persona is described reacting to the situation which is his ostensible subject.

Brian Moore's new novel, *Catholics,* and Hugh Hood's *You Cant Get There From Here* do not transcend the realm of their public concerns. Their interest lies in their credibility; the accuracy with which their events evoke the world we know now or are likely to know in the future. The detail in their created settings is lifeless; the characters exemplary rather than living.

Catholics is set in the future — at the end of the twentieth century. A Catholic priest from an order firmly established in the ecumenical movement is dispatched as Plenipotentiary to a remote island abbey off the Irish coast. His task is to persuade the Abbot and monks to cease saying the old Latin mass. The revival of the old custom has been the subject of a television documentary, and has caused herds of pilgrims to stampede each week to the "Mass rock" on the mainland opposite the island. The ecumenical movement (with its headquarters in Amsterdam) is likely to be distressed at the resurgence of sectarian customs at a moment when an *apertura* with Buddhism is imminent.

His setting gives the author ample opportunity to develop the irony implicit in "advanced" religious views: the "correct" attitude towards the mass is that it is a symbolic act alone; God is not really present; the miraculous element of faith is removed. The Plenipotentiary meets sullen opposition from the isolated monks who see their rituals as essential to the

mystery of their faith. The Abbot is a *prelatus nullius* (nobody's priest); he can ignore the advice of his provincial. It is for this reason that the Plenipotentiary has to visit the abbey. After a night of skirmishing with the Abbot and his simple-minded monks, the Plenipotentiary departs with the Abbot's assurance that the old heretical practices will cease. The irony of the Abbot's rights as a *prelatus nullius* are the centre of attention, however. He himself has ceased to hold the absolute faith which the old rituals presuppose. It is an empty, symbolic act (in keeping with the blandness of the new creed) that he accepts the directive and persuades his flock to obey. He cannot, however, pray with conviction. God is not in the tabernacle.

Brian Moore's narrative moves firmly and quickly. There are graphic descriptions of frugal life on the island. But the book is really too slight to provoke one into caring. Its message — that faith depends on mystery and ritual — is hardly worth its one hundred and seven pages. The reader certainly gets little more than a sardonic preview, presented for its own sake, of the demystification of Christianity.

You Cant Get There From Here is more exotic and less lightly woven. The setting is Leofrica, an imaginary state granted independence from United Nations trusteeship in the opening chapter. The country's only export is ground-nut oil, processed in an American refinery. The provisional President/Prime Minister is Anthony Jedeb, son of a local tribesman turned trader, and the only Leofrican to hold a graduate degree (an American M.Agr.Sc.).

The country lurches from empty independence into chaos. Its two tribes grow increasingly distrustful of each other. Its new paper currency does not even attract pilfering from the dockers unloading the first issue. While the American Ambassador and Soviet Trade Commissioner compete to provide services and offer favours, the secret agents of their respective countries see to it that relations are ruptured, each hoping to land the other with the unenviable task of being big brother to Leofrica. The American agent (Jedeb's private secretary) burns down the American refinery; the Soviet agent (the woman whom Jedeb loves and elevates to the cabinet) has the Russian cartographic expedition killed by tribesmen. The reward of the superpower double-dealing is that they leave China holding the baby. Through the machinations of the Albanian representative, the inland tribe declares itself an independent republic under the imaginary leadership of a murdered cabinet minister and the real leadership of the police officer who murdered him. While Chinese jets from the secessionist republic buzz the town, Jedeb attempts to escape from his riot-torn capital, but is gunned down by his ex-fiancée's agents as he tries to swim the border river.

Apart from the recurring motif that power politics are dirty, there is little to hold the book together. Some readers have seen an analogy between intertribal jealousies in Leofrica and the hostility between French and English in Canada. There is little reason, however, to read the novel as a Canadian parable; and even less illumination if one does. No character emerges from the tableau with life or vigour. The reader's sympathies cannot be formulated, let alone engaged. For all Hood's wealth of journalistic detail, the country and its people remain

two-dimensional, described at length, but without any imaginative life of their own. The twists of the plot are unexpected and far from tedious. Aside from excessive explanations of the history and culture of the region, the narrative is entertaining. But political revelation is not at hand. The reader is in no danger of having his prejudices challenged on the viability of emerging states, the fatuity of a two-nation concept, the cynicism of the superpowers, or the wickedness of the world.

ROWLAND SMITH

POISONED BY THE SYSTEM

JOHN METCALF, *Going Down Slow.* McClelland and Stewart. $5.95.

METCALFE'S FIRST NOVEL is a free-swinging and very funny attack on the Establishment. The target is The System, not simply the Montreal high school system but the whole North American credo: athletics and sports cars are important but art isn't; conformity and hypocrisy will be rewarded; and what matters can be put on a Kardex file. The treatment is comic but the humour is black, and at times as bitter as the bile that teacher David Appleby retches up at the novel's end.

Appleby (advance oneself *by* giving an *apple* to the teacher?) is a young Englishman just over from Britain, a newcomer to the teaching game. A latter-day Quixote, he thinks he can vanquish prejudice, prudery and pettiness single-handed. He does get in quite a few blows and succeeds in making his antagonist look thoroughly ridiculous. It's a Pyrrhic victory, for The System defeats him in the end.

Metcalf is already known for his short fiction. *The Lady Who Sold Furniture*, a collection of short stories, was published in 1970, and his fiction has appeared in periodicals and anthologies. Several of these short pieces have classroom settings and themes which anticipate this novel. They depict a system that tends to brutalize teacher and student alike, a system penalizing the imaginative and forcing the independent spirit to conform. In *Going Down Slow*, David's fellow teacher Jim is willing to play by the rules of those in power. Jim goes in for guidance, administration, and higher degrees. He ends with a fat OISE grant and a white Galaxy 500 with red upholstery. David, a born loser, gets to retain his hated job, at the cost of betraying his girl and sacrificing both his freedom and his self-respect. In capitulating to The System, it's downhill all the way. David, like The System, is going down slow, and the process isn't always pretty to watch.

Genuine satire has a coral base, and Metcalf is a moralist, an idealist-*cum*-cynic, although that seems like a strange combination. Not for him the serious and sentimental diatribe against the attitudes represented by principal McPhee and the city Board. David's little jokes include the invention of a non-existent historical journal, the O.N.Q. (Oxford Notes and Queries). The principal swallows the bait, hooked by the word "Oxford".

David tells McPhee that he's merely trying to force his students "into writing about real things and real feelings in a real world". McPhee prefers the policy of the Board: sex may have a place in

the nation but at least it can be excluded from the schools. The principal doesn't know the meaning of the word *bowdlerize* but he thoroughly approves of the idea. MacLennan's *Two Solitudes* is taught in a bowdlerized version. After all references to sex have been carefully expurgated from the novel, the Toronto scholar responsible for editing the castrated text and supplying the questions for high school students has the gall (or is it, David wonders, a finely developed sense of humour?) to ask: Does MacLennan adequately account for Marius' attitudes and actions? The answer requires the student to know the very parts which have been carefully removed from his edition.

Since David has not yet been granted his Permanent Certificate — this is the principal's big stick — he is forced to submit to Bunceford's demonstration lesson in composition. The lesson consists in the department head's reading from what he calls a beautiful descriptive passage written by the famous British author Sir Compton Mackenzie. The heavy-handed sentiment and flowery rhetoric is choice material for a satirist like Metcalf. Bunceford's preferred rhetoric ("the fairest dearest inn down all that billowy London road") offers an effective contrast to David's goal of exposing his students to real feelings in a real world. Montreal taverns are more likely to be called Whisky A-Go-Go than Basket of Roses Inn, Compton Mackenzie's choice.

School texts for English seem to begin and end with *Moonfleet* (a touch of hyperbole here) and the librarian is a faithful consumer of the products of Time-Life Inc. Many teachers dislike reading; some write abominable neo-Wordsworthian poems, which David enjoys reciting aloud when drunk; and most of the teachers fear sex like the plague. The department head's grade eleven students claim that Bunceford traditionally turns over two pages in a Latin text to avoid a photo of a naked statue. Principal McPhee confiscates half of David's class display of photographs, unmoved by David's plea that the photos are from an internationally famous collection. As McPhee solemnly points out, "the area of sex is a sensitive one."

Susan Haddad, David's precocious student and his mistress, is a richly comic Lolita, one of the best creations in the novel. At one point, in a gesture prophetic of his final capitulation, David urges her to study for her coming exams and plan on going to McGill. Susan prefers to retain her freedom. Earlier, she has refused to comment on four lines of Bunceford's poetry (lines that compare with the best — or is it the worst? — of Sarah Binks, the Sweet Songstress of Saskatchewan). Susan wrote: "I don't want to waste my time writing about bad poetry." The nation's Buncefords do not take kindly to honesty such as this.

Although a summary of the novel's concerns suggests something out of *This Magazine is About Schools*, this is fiction not journalism, and rather brilliant fiction at that. Teacher David tells Susan that a writer depends upon literary tradition. Writer Metcalf has obviously taken his own advice. Many of his comic techniques are straight out of Firbank and Waugh. One of the most effective is the cumulative or running joke, as when Jim tells David to go into guidance if he wants to get ahead; five chapters further on we find Garry has gone into guidance. No further comment here, as David stares at the announcement. References

to the stuffed squirrel that accompanies David and Susan on their night on the town are funnier with each recurrence.

The element of fantasy found in many of Metcalf's stories is negligible in this novel, but mordant humour is a common denominator. The novel is told in the third person, but centred in David's iconoclastic point of view and his wry sense of humour. David has his own standard of values ("His bank of free Sick Days already overdrawn in bed with Susan") and they are not those of The System. The story takes on something of the bouncy, irrepressible manner of its leading character.

In the first half of the novel, David's sense of superiority to the Montreal Yahoos may begin to irritate you. But as the trap closes around him (his contract is yet to be renewed, and just what other job could he hold?), as his friend Garry betrays him and Jim takes off in his Galaxy 500, you're likely to agree with Metcalf: vomiting is the suitable response to the obscenities of The System.

PATRICIA MORLEY

THE VATIC UPSURGE

JOE ROSENBLATT, *Bumblebee Dithyramb.* Press Porcepic. $6.95.

TIM INKSTER, *The Topolobampo Poems.* Press Porcepic. $3.95.

ELDON GARNET, *Angel.* Press Porcepic. n.p.

THESE THREE BOOKS are symptomatic of a recent upsurge of the "vatic" voice, of the Blakean prophetic stance, of the poet as dark seer, oracle. I don't mean that these poets actually profess to be magicians, but that they render the ordinary surfaces of everyday existence always in psychedelic colours, and always in heightened hallucinatory tones. On the whole, I think that what is intended to be "exalted" or bardic is often only strained, like the too-bright smile of the hysteric.

Let me begin with Rosenblatt to try and pin down what I mean: There are a number of poems in this new collection from two previous books. The Uncle Nathan poems, "Metamorpho", I Get High on Butterflies poems, etc. were found, with slight variation, in *The LSD Leacock* and *Winter of the Luna Moth.* Perhaps now, seen in the company of the bumblebee poems, these earlier poems are given a new context, adumbrate the new poems? Or are they simply here to pad out the new book?

In one way, this new collection is the logical culmination of certain obsessive themes, images, etc. in the earlier books. Both of the earlier books had a very academic, literary, EngLit allusiveness: "No! I am not Prince Metamorpho, nor was meant to be ... ("Metamorpho I") "Lying out on Dover Beach ... " ("Metamorpho III") "Why he'd scare a grasshopper" in "Sapphire" was "Why he'd scare a grasshopper out of Kafka" in the same poem in *LSD Leacock*, which may indicate that the poet had become conscious of this direction in his work and was revising to make the poem less allusive. There are, as well, in these poems, lingering Eliotic juxtapositions of the vulgar and the learned: "If I could rise like a spirit from a shawl/ I'd trade my original Capt. Marvel comic book ... "

Another obsession seen in Rosenblatt's work is with animal imagery: many poems about grasshoppers, bull frogs, butterflies, bats, pigs, mice, penguins, crickets, tadpoles, fish, eggs (if they can be seen as at least potential animals)

and, of course, bees. Perhaps all of this can be seen as an attempt to get away from the wiseass academic bent so discernible in the other poems and towards a simpler, more organic and natural domain. There is an exuberant spirit in the bumblebee poems, but I feel that the Dionysian enthusiasm is not so much wild freedom as it is cold calculation, like the stylized posed emotion in a Gericault painting. At their best, these poems exhibit a childlike wonder and fascination with life in its smallest forms. At their worst, they are simply rhetoric.

Garnet's *Angel* is made up of forty poems, most of them brief, divided into three sections. The first section, "Superman," consists of fifteen poems, most of them about past sexual encounters, imagined sexual exploits, about the persona's voracious ego, many of these in a tone of wry self-congratulatory mockery. The second section is "Waiting: in thirty-one parts", and seems to be a more leisurely exploration of the same territory as "Superman". The tone of bombast and boast is muted here, but the ego obsession remains the centre of rapt attention, with all the details of a vacation diary: "I the jealous lover fumbling over morning tea I wake early and/ perform the ritual of breakfast coffee au lait and croissants . . ." Why do poets like to think the reader will be interested in the details of someone else's vacation? It is a bit like watching somebody's travel slides; your irritation is increased by the knowledge that you could do the same thing if you had the effrontery.

The third section, "The One-Winged Angel," consists of more poems in the mood of "Superman": "in her legs i see the forest of my desires . . . " ("Desires") "where blaring through your pale openmouth surprise/ would thrust her hot and sweaty Newfoundland hand/ down into your pants . . ." ("An Insult to Sandie.") I can discern no reason for this section being set off by itself. The poems here do not rise above the level of those in "Superman" and could easily be placed back there.

Tim Inkster's *Topolobampo Poems* is divided into two sections, "Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues" and "The Topolobampo Poems". The second section is further subdivided into a travel sequence: "Starting from Toronto," "arrival: late morning", "morning of the second day: pre-dawn", "the third day", and "toronto four days later". These poems are in the same ego-absorbed mood as Garnet's travel poems. Women are seen as "black angels" in several poems by both poets, witches who challenge the ego's machismo. There is a frenzied tone of surrealism: " . . . a one arm midget/ parading/ in drag in a dunce cap . . . " ("Memo to a some-time whore.") There is nothing generic, nothing intrinsic in the poems to provide a reasonable context for this fevered heracleitan transformation of everything simple into something fevered and nightmarish.

The second section, the travel poems, as in Garnet's "Waiting", uses the impact of foreign environments on the persona's sensibility as a device for the "plot" of the poems. See the ego expand in Mexico! Watch him discover a dead fish on the beach! Why are poets still agonizing over animals found dead here and there?

Ultimately, Inkster has a more realistic style than Garnet, with an eye for concrete details like Rosenblatt's. But the primary impulse in *Topolobampo* is to soar off this solid base into some kind of

mystic circus. The overall effect of this book is a mirror image of Garnet's.

Press Porcepic has begun its existence with some beautifully produced books: complementing type fonts (9 pt. Century Medium in all three for the text, titles and headings variously 14 pt. Italian Old-style, Libra, and 18 pt. Bembo Roman), elegant paper, creative and striking art work (Rosenblatt's is his own) and attractive, even exquisite wrappers.

But I am perhaps more disappointed in the poetry than I would have been had the books been themselves less attractive. As it is, I have a kind of Emperor's New Clothes feeling. I feel as if I have been had, and very skilfully.

EUGENE MCNAMARA

SPIES AND TEMPESTS

E. G. PERRAULT, *The Twelfth Mile*. Doubleday, $5.95.

The Twelfth Mile, E. J. Perrault's second novel, is described on the jacket as "A Novel of Adventure and Espionage at Sea". As such it is undoubtedly successful; it advances with ever-increasing tension to a dramatic and moving conclusion. Each of the events that are woven into the plot is plausible, and the tale as a whole is told with almost repertorial realism.

The principal characters are paradoxically not human. They are a tug boat, small but tremendously powerful, the *Haida Noble* (out of Vancouver — Captain, Christy Westholme); a massive and awkward off-shore oil rig, "the biggest semi-submersible drill rig in existence", BUTCO 17 (owners, British United Traction, and manned largely by Americans, including an American oceanographer, Michael Volkoff); an oceanographic research vessel, the *Irkutsk* (owner, the Russian Academy of Sciences — Captain, Mikhail Kutskov); and the sea — or more specifically the waters of the Pacific Ocean, off the southwest tip of Vancouver Island. And of all the characters, the sea is the most powerful; lashed into fury by Hurricane Faith and driven into an even greater madness by the sweeping force of a giant tidal wave — or *tsunami* — born of the collapse of "100 miles of rock structure along the Aleutian Trench", it is the sea that brings sudden death to BUTCO 17 and eventual destruction to the *Irkutsk*, and drives the *Haida Noble* to the brink of an ocean grave.

I have suggested that a feeling of authenticity permeates *The Twelfth Mile*. The author moves with an ease bred of personal knowledge of the Pacific coast, and also of patient research, through the technical language of tug boat and oil drill operations and the scientific terminology needed to describe a cyclonic storm and a *tsunami*. The seed of the novel was probably planted in his mind some six or more years ago when he prepared the text and supervised, for Island Tug & Barge Limited, the publication of *Ocean Highway*, which appeared in 1967 as the company's centennial project. It contains stories of many a long tow, many a rescue, and many a salvage job by such famous work-horse tugs as the *Sudbury* and *Sudbury II*, and its illustrations significantly include photographs of difficult operations with oil rigs.

Among the other ingredients embedded in Perrault's mind by the time he began to trace the plot of *The Twelfth Mile* were the tensions created by the activities

of the Russian fishing fleets just outside the twelve mile limit off Vancouver Island and by the presence of oceanographic vessels in the Pacific, as well as vivid memories of Typhoon (or Hurricane) Freda that swept across the Pacific Northwest coast in 1962, drove through Vancouver, and left in its wake vast areas of destruction: a disaster that was soon followed, in 1964, by the powerful tidal wave — or *tsunami* — that thrust down from Alaska along the west coast of Vancouver Island, pushed up the Alberni Inlet, and eventually penetrated bays, channels and river mouths along the coast of Washington and Oregon.

These, then, were the basic materials that Perrault refined and blended into a realistic yet fictional account of what could happen — what might still happen — in the Pacific waters off Amphitrite Point, not far from the fishing village of Ucluelet on the southwesterly shore of Vancouver Island.

All I need say in summary of the plot is that it opens with the *Haida Noble* on a routine assignment, to bring BUTCO 17 into winter harbour — and ends in violent conflict between the tug and its skipper, Westholme, and the *Irkutsk* and its captain, Kutskov. For the tug has linked up with the *Irkutsk* as it is about to be driven on the rocks off Amphitrite Point (well within the twelve mile limit) — and the *Irkutsk* is a spy ship as well as an oceanographic research vessel. Also involved in the closing stages of the drama are the American scientist Volkoff (an oceanographer, true, but also employed by an American federal agency for "a specialized kind of watching"), and the Russian doctor, Larissa Lebedovitch, a humanitarian and a woman of infinite kindness and courage.

Almost inevitably, the dialogue between the opposing characters reflects their political ideals and beliefs, yet Perrault creates no dark villains and no shining heroes. Westholme, the Canadian, is basically apolitical, and wants only to go about his job to the best of his ability. He always considers the welfare of his small crew and the safety of his boat, yet he is willing to risk much against great odds to save the lives of people, no matter whence they come or what their political beliefs may be. Volkoff, the American, is intelligent and courageous, but at his worst moment, blinded by his political naiveté, he would gladly see the personnel of the *Irkutsk* at the bottom of the sea. And Kutskov, the Russian, rigid, disciplined, ruthless, and completely obedient to the dictates of the state, is nevertheless a man of undoubted courage, of integrity, and of profundity of feeling, who, in the last moments of action, achieves a nobility that evokes the sympathy of the reader — at least of this reader.

In the final analysis, Perrault lifts his "Novel of Adventure and Espionage at Sea" into a plea for international co-operation and understanding. At the end of the last chapter the members of the United Nations Committee on the Peaceful Uses of the Sea Bed and the Ocean Floor (a committee touched on in earlier chapters) are back again at the conference table around which they have held endless arguments that have borne no fruit. This day the room echoes with charges and counter-charges, affirmations and denials — all based on the scanty news they have received of yesterday's incident on the Pacific coast. The chairman, tired and frustrated by political casuistry and evasion, says wearily: "We have many things to resolve . . . all of them, without

exception, of the utmost importance to survival and international welfare. Adjournment then until after lunch ... and please, gentlemen, let us apply ourselves earnestly to the issues at stake."

So ends this tale of adventure and espionage. There may be faults in the technicalities, but I am unaware of them, and the coincidence that brings together hurricane and tidal wave may perhaps be questioned, but this is certainly a conjunction that is possible if not highly probable. And in its general effect this is a good novel which adds to its writer's achievements.

S. E. READ

PERHAPS PROFOUND

GEORGE BOWERING, *George, Vancouver*. Weed-Flower Press, $2.00.

VICTOR COLEMAN, *Old Friend's Ghosts*. Weed-Flower Press, $3.00.

WEED/FLOWER PRESS is a one-man operation run at minimal cost, yet its books are always meticulously and chastely done, and its list to date shows true perceptiveness regarding contemporary poetry. While the two books under review are minor works, each is by a good poet and each contains fine poetry.

Bowering's *George, Vancouver* mixes fact and fancy, reminding us of Olson's curious iambic (curious, perhaps, because it is iambic): "Off-shore, by islands hidden in the blood" — for that is the spirit of the poem, discovery and not transformation, uncovering the hard fact.

The uncovering has momentary interruptions, such as the question marooned on p. 11: "Does anyone by the name of Vancouver/ live in Vancouver?" — an approach almost in the manner of, say, Ron Padgett; but we are not marooned for long and we continue through substance, ably navigated, until we reach: *"I keep losing sight of the subject/Captain Vancouver seems lost in the poem"*. Even though this introduces a passage of some tension, we know here for certain that we are not in the presence of that Coleridge (invoked in the text) whose Ancient Mariner "stoppeth one of three", but rather of S.T.C., theorist of fancy.

Contrasted with the unforced mythos of *Rocky Mountain Foot*, *George, Vancouver* is small work, though, happily, just as grounded upon tangibles. Perhaps "grounded" is more than apt. Strikingly, despite this being a voyage poem, a poem of movement, there is a preponderance of objects, — potatoes, pines, islands, valuable plants, seed collections, — and two of the 30-odd pages are a list of names of vessels which sailed off the Northwest Coast in 1792.

Such catalogues recall Williams and Olson (and even Whitman) and offer their own satisfactions, but here the poem is taken over by names and rendered static. Rather out of scale, too, is the use of found passages. All this pragmatic insistence is set over against mere intimations of "a felt presence" recognizing, perhaps, of the voyager, that "it was no grail/ he was after, he was not/ sailing with that kind of purity" — a summing-up appropriate also to the poem's making.

What I value in the book is a characteristic cleanness of line. While it has obvious sources, *George, Vancouver*, as a Bowering work, is a small piece of an interesting larger picture.

A "quiet" poetry, Victor Coleman's work shows (perhaps too overtly in this collection?) influences of Williams-Zukofsky-Olson-Creeley. Coleman has

their habit of private reference ("Wieners/ alone in his little room in Buffalo"), which gives much of the writing a deliberately contingent air, reinforced at times by (deliberate?) flatness. Quietness is integral in another way, for Coleman is a genuinely contemplative poet who can, occasionally, be very moving.

In an "argument" poem such as "The Air of York Sings", a text on Robert Kelly's characteristic declaration: "how dare/ Canadians not be/ americans", flatness of tone, with its unsuccessful sound puns ("Cold can/aid an/air") and phrases such as "an inability to produce density", tells against the force of the argument.

Sound is the clue to Coleman's work. It dominates the group of Susie Asado poems, but these do not have the vitality of, say, bp nichol's soundpoems because the run of sounds conveys a crossword-puzzle effect rather than pure music. Other pieces, such as "For Tune" and the Zukofskyish "After Reading SPRING & ALL, ALL IN ALL, & ALL", work very well, making one realize that the core of Coleman's work is "the protein of language", as sound, presented, for he feels that "The vocable of the printed poem/ strangles in binding".

One difficulty in gauging this book on its own terms is the presence of so many influences peering over the poet's shoulder. A pervasiveness of Williams, a touch of Creeley and Olson, overt responses to Pound and Zukofsky — and there is even one to Frank O'Hara. As one tuned to the same set of general influences, I sympathize and am interested; but it is not easy to identify, yet, what is distinctly Coleman.

Most distinct is that sense of quiet already referred to, evident in "The Butterfly" or (both Williams-like and Zen-like) "The Natural Is":

> The exercise of the milkweed
> is to push itself up, flower
> into a huff of down.
>
> Only incidental that it draws
> great welting hives on the head
> and arms of Elizabeth.

Everything in Coleman's universe is its own natural function, so that abstraction is prostitution, "The State is a whore", money is "hypocracy" (sic), and the divisions of "The Left & the Right" are equally immoral. Such considerations are set off against the virtue of acceptance, of "No purpose". Such considerations are, if not commonplace, certainly not uncommon today. Their signposts here are helpful enough, though many, perhaps, do not need them, while the ones who still prefer "the balance" of "The Complete Room" to human messiness and warmth may be unreachable. Probably they are not, but these muted poems are not likely to be the means.

Coleman's strength is in his music, and he does avoid "the pleasant whining of a mandolin", offering something more austere, less self-indulgent. A propos of that, he can assure us, beautifully:

> I salvage the poem from the heart
> bent against too easy speech,
> put my mouth to its mouth
> and breathe the music in.

As a declaration of intent this seems fair, and accurate. The best of *one eye love* and *Light Verse* can take such lines as epigraph. *Old Friends' Ghosts* adds somewhat to an exciting prospect, that when Victor Coleman discovers a music entirely his own it will be beautiful, and perhaps profound.

MIKE DOYLE

DISTORTING MIRROR

GWENDOLYN MAC EWEN, *Noman*, Oberon. $2.95

IN *Noman*, Gwendolyn MacEwen has woven a mediaeval tapestry of short stories, whose warp is a tradition of cultural mythology and whose woof is the Canadian (Kanadian to the author) urban landscape. The ritual figures and conventional symbolism which lavishly decorate MacEwen's poetry and prose are brought to life in a confrontation with reality. The golden arrow becomes bow and arrow, the messiah becomes social iconoclast, and the horsemen ride right out of *Revelation* into a modern country carnival. The process of revitalization takes the symbolic figures of her stories out of allegory and the so-called Dark Ages into a modern baroque sensibility. The energy of MacEwen's prose and poetry manifests a philosophical mannerism. Beyond the gilt of her gestalt, there is fire. Beyond the answers, there are questions. As Kanada moves into her Renaissance, MacEwen records her history with the language of a universal sibyl.

Embracing the shared cultural history of the Kanadian Indian, Gypsy, Jew and Anglo-Saxon, MacEwen's stories are the one and the many united symbolically in the figurative and material arch. The arch is the way to a higher reality and one of several motifs woven through the collection of stories.

> There, beyond the arch, is the forest. There is the naked, ancient door. You have only to pass under the arch to be free, to be away from this place, but you watch the arch and grow afraid, for the arch is watching you. The Little King and the Fairy Queen are watching you. And all the trees are silently screaming.

In "Kingsmere", the denigration of a former Prime Minister's attempt to transplant European civilization to the Kanadian landscape, MacEwen focuses on the artificial gothic arch as a possible escape from the tensions of past and present to a transcendental reality, Noman's land, where unity in multiplicity is possible. In counterpoint to the urban jungle, for which King's ruins are a false alternative, MacEwen describes the forest and primal innocence.

One way back to the forest through the arch is through the experience of purifying fire. In "Fire" and "The Second Coming of Julian the Magician", lovers undertake a ritual burning of all their material objects and are cleansed. The phoenix rises out of ashes from Woolworth's. Snow is death, myth frozen into history and beyond the comprehension of people determined to find their identity and ultimate redemption. Snow is the jewel trapped in a gold setting and fire is the living object.

Noman is the medium for salvation, like Julian in MacEwen's novel, *Julian the Magician*, the messiah. He is the magician who will act as the catalyst in his own experiment. In spite of the weight of her imagery and the complexity of her philosophy, her stories are human and humorous. Noman is a joke, human and divine. Names do not matter and are changed at will, just as masks are put on and taken off. Canada as Kanada is interchangeably the real and the mythological country.

The confusion of realities, which is a problem of language and communication, leads in the stories to madness and

murder against the cacophonous background of the Kanadian city.

> "I wish I could tell you that this city was just another myth, but it's not. It smacks too much of reality."
> "Well, what else." I cried, exasperated with you. "First it's a whale house, then you want it to be a myth — couldn't it just be a city, for Heaven's sake?"

Noman, like F. in Cohen's *Beautiful Losers*, orchestrates the jokes and the tragedies. Gwendolyn MacEwen shares Leonard Cohen's preoccupation with the ecumenical possibility in the emerging Kanadian cultural consciousness. Unlike fellow philosophers of the Kanadian urban ghettoes — Mordecai Richler, who maintains a Jewish point of view, and Margaret Atwood, who would extricate herself from history — Cohen and MacEwen attempt to fuse in fire the heterogeneous elements of the vocabulary. They draw their imagery from past and present and the result is fantastic but never incredible.

In "Day of Twelve Princes", a gothic tale of madness and incest, masks and unmasking, Samuel, the young protagonist, escapes his house of death-in-birth on a romantic quest for the carnival, his world in microcosm and one he can handle, because there is no hypocrisy attached to its illusions. MacEwen's stories are a carnival, full of pageant and beauty, misery and ugliness.

> Anyway, when I was eighteen, I went to work in the carnival. I thought I'd find the first and the last of the world's real people there in that wild crossroads of cultures... But I didn't have time to learn the craft, so I became a clown. I had great conversations with myself as I was cleaning up after the show. "I'm not a clown I'm a genius", I'd say to the mirror... "Under this absurd mask I am a holy man."

The great human circus is reflected in mirrors and mirrors do not lie, or do they? "I am already the distorter, I am already the mirror." The writer is the mirror, but then the writer distorts. Like Virginia Woolf in *Between the Acts*, MacEwen deliberately comments on her function as mirror and then warns the viewer to beware. LINDA ROGERS

SUSPENSEFUL SEPARATISM

MICHAEL SHELDON, *The Death of a Leader*. McClelland & Stewart Ltd. $4.95.

MICHAEL SHELDON'S latest book, *Death of a Leader*, is a gripping mystery novel of political intrigue. But although it is billed as "topical", it is not really very closely related to current events. That Montreal happens to be the setting and that bits and pieces of Pierre Trudeau, René Lévesque and a number of other real Quebeckers happen to be incorporated in the characterizations are probably incidental. The book's purpose is not to offer insight into Canadian affairs and personalities, but to entertain; and entertain it does.

It is, of course, difficult to talk about *Death of a Leader* without compromising the book's principal quality — suspense. Sheldon writes in the best tradition of the "whodunit". A murder has been committed, and the reader soon learns that many people could have been responsible. Motives — political, personal and philosophical — abound. The victim was a Separatist leader whom a variety of friends and enemies, French and English, Separatist and Federalist, rich and poor, male and female, are pleased to see out of the way.

The hero of Sheldon's novel, Marc De Montigny, is a diplomat who has just re-

turned from Paris. He is asked by the Prime Minister, an old friend, to find out why the murder has taken place. De Montigny is not a James Bond superman, but he is not far off. And a good bit of his undercover work is conducted in bed with attractive women.

The book moves quickly, and suspense is effectively maintained until the very end. All in all, an entertaining and well written spy story, *Death of a Leader* is the best of Sheldon's four novels to date. Perhaps the author has at last found his ideal genre.

RONALD SUTHERLAND

KNOW WHAT TO SEE

DOROTHY FARMILOE, *Blue Is the Colour of Death.* Fiddlehead Poetry Books, $1.00.

NOW MORE THAN EVER before we are beginning to seriously comprehend what we had once taken for granted: the essentiality of the natural world, the endangered environment, and our living relation to it.

Dorothy Farmiloe's fourth volume of poems is an anguished document in that direction, particularly the long ecology-collage poem from which her book takes its title.

"Blue Is the Colour of Death" is virtually, as its subheading says, "a short history of Southern Ontario" rendered in diverse but complementary perspectives. Farmiloe's poetic diction assimilates the terminological categories of sociology, geology, and other sciences to present a total vision of her environment. The title's ambiguity may sound like an affectation to some, but it should be kept in mind that "blue" is also the colour of a robin's egg, ferrous sulphate, despondency, etc.; thus the chromatic metaphor is a valid one.

Structurally, the poem progresses fuguelike over twenty-four strophes, and historical fact merges into irony until the whole thing rains down like a baleful warning. Man must live as a part of nature rather than apart from nature. The poem's true meaning is man's ultimate survival depending on that axiom.

"Blue Is the Colour of Death" is Farmiloe's most ambitious work to date. And it's a shame that some of the stanzas were transposed accidentally by the printer. In a technical sense, it's ironic too.

The book's second section, "Third Thought Poems," contains incidental pieces, all of which allude in one way or another, to man, nature and death. The dominant mood of these short poems is one of existential absurdity. They explore the human condition, alienation and solitude, and the futile search for meaning and reality.

Poems like "Postmortem After the Quarrel", "Watching the Late Late News", and "After Technology—What?" aggravate the situation with a code of emergency. These are powerful and ruthless compositions, and their imagery is severe "as the furious protest inside a lightbulb seconds to blackout." Only in two poems does Farmiloe vacillate between morality and humour.

The effect of a book like this is almost cathectic; it sears the psyche and leaves the reader numb with his own impressions. You can feel Farmiloe's words like "guerrilla cells blasting what's left of the flesh." Intense concentration, a scalpel-sharp sensibility, word-as-seed, and the

imaginative magic of language — these are aspects of her creative vision: she knows where to look and what to see.

LEN GASPARINI

NATIVE COUNTRY FOOD

JAMES HOUSTON, *The White Dawn*. Longman, $7.95.

HOUSTON isn't subtle enough about translating the Eskimo mind into English; he doesn't care much nor he is disturbed by the differences. Consequently he's written a bad book. There is little speech rhythm in the speech, no organic organization, really no theme, when the death of the Eskimo culture is such a profound occurrence. But Houston wrote *The White Dawn* as if igloos were built on the Rue Morgue. His love for the Eskimo is the same kind of love that Lawrence analysed in his essay on Poe.

But the book raises certain issues. Houston has been at the benevolent spearhead of the white world in its contact with the Eskimo. He should inherit the work of men like Rasmussen and M'Clintock. Yet in his novel we see behind the benevolence the destruction of primitive society. *The White Dawn*, thought of as a popular document, could be replaced by *I, Nuligak* and *Across Arctic America* by Rasmussen. But the essential purpose of the book, to the reviewer, makes it representative of anthropological literature.

The key to the book is the treatment of the shaman. The author chose an unpleasant, fat, greasy figure for a shaman and a near idiot for an assistant. The choice is of symbolic significance, as is the Red Canyon, the redness of which reminds me of "The Masque of the Red Death". The *angakok* conducted a ceremonial performance but afterwards Avinga, the crippled Eskimo narrator, stumbled on the mechanics of what could be a trick. But the mechanics, to my reading, were unimportant; Houston quietly communicated his white suspicion and unbelief. The whole weight of the book focuses on Houston's essential statement; the shaman is a fake. For in denying the reality of the shaman's magic he denies the very fabric of Eskimo life.

The reader gathers from *The White Dawn* that magic was a sideline interest of the Eskimo. But really it pervaded the whole of life. The concerned student thinks of it as engaging the Eskimo mind in a way similar to our experience of Newtonian physics. The average man, not a professional scientist, is inarticulate about Newton. But he lives out of a perception of the world for which Newton makes sense, believing absolutely that the sun is a ball of gas. The Eskimo on the other hand carried his weather amulets and thought the sun a conscious being. Houston doesn't so much as glimpse the difference. By making the shaman a charlatan he makes the substance of all Eskimo life a matter of ridicule. Which is what our civilization has done to the Eskimo; here in Inuvik, when you buy reindeer meat from the government herd, the Eskimo has been trained to call it 'native country food'.

COLIN ROSS

THE INSOLENT INFINITY

CLARK BLAISE, *A North American Education.* Doubleday. $6.95.

THIS COLLECTION of Clark Blaise's fiction is most impressive, if at times not fully satisfying. Both these facts arise from the use Blaise makes of an autobiographical voice, the ability, which is his particular talent, of creating the illusion that the reader is the confidant of an author relating anecdotes of an intimate and revealing nature. This sense that one is dealing with autobiographical fiction is unavoidable; it comes from the feel of the stories, it is insisted upon on the dust jacket, it is mused upon by one of Blaise's narrators:

> I used to write miniature novels, vividly imagined, set anywhere my imagination moved me. Then something slipped. I started writing of myself and these vivid moments in a confusing flux.

Within his stories Blaise's protagonists experience just such moments in just such flux, and their experiences are shared by the reader as well with striking immediacy. Blaise has elsewhere disavowed the short story as shaped by Joyce and Hemingway, but his stories are still more traditional than experimental in form — and their conclusions frequently have the appearance of Joycean epiphanies. However, rereading shows these to be pseudo-epiphanies which serve not to reveal something, but to lead the reader back into the depths of the story, leaving him to reflect on the experience more than to understand it. Thus in "Eyes", the shortest but perhaps the best story of the collection, the conclusion functions not as resolution but as emblem, encapsulating the emotional mood of the story (indeed of the book), one of alienation, dislocation — a mood the story creates not through straight-forward narrative, but through careful juxtaposition of not obviously related incidents.

It is in the creation of these small incidents of dramatic impact that Blaise shows his skill, finding them in the most mundane events and structuring his narrative around them. Often this can be as nightmarish as the surrealistic reality of the roaches in "Extractions and Contractions". Cleaning his infant's bowel movement from the apartment carpet:

> For a minute or two it goes well, then I notice glistening shapes staggering from the milky foam; the harder I press, the more appear. *My child has roaches,* his belly is teeming, full of bugs, a plague of long brown roaches is living inside him, thriving on our neglect. The roaches creep and dart in every direction, I whack them with wooden brush but more are boiling from the foam and now they appear on my hand and arm. I see two on the shoulder of my white shirt. I shout but my throat is closed... These are not my son's; they are the rug's. The other side of this fine Irish rug that we bought for a house in the suburbs that we later decided against, this rug that we haven't turned in months and haven't sent out to be cleaned, is a sea of roaches.

This passage also illustrates Blaise's tendency to focus on the trivial stuff of quotidien life, with the inherent danger that goes with such focus — that of creating minimal art, of working one remove from the journal. But the stories are consistently made artful by their author's knack of imparting or implying significance in the events that he chronicles:

> The elevator opens on 11 and two students turn away, seeing that it's full. We stop on 10 but no one is waiting. We are trapped by the buttons other people press before they take the stairs.

The dissatisfaction I feel in reading this book centres around two problems created by the use of autobiography. The first of these is the problem of form. The stories are divided into three groups, "The Montreal Stories", "The Keeler Stories", "The Thibidault Stories", each featuring a different central character. Yet the presentation of these stories as a collection, the similarities — despite the differences — between their heroes, the unifying impression that the sum of these stories depicts "a North American education" of one man, the writer who stands behind these various characters, all this implies an overall unity that is elusively not quite there. Together the stories achieve an impact that they would lack separately, but at the same time the inconsistencies between them, their shifting protagonists, are distracting. It makes the reader wish that the work had been revised so that it would come together as a whole.

My other, perhaps less important, objection is that the author-reader intimacy this book achieves is sometimes with an author who does not like himself very much — with the consequence that we are perhaps less desirous of the intimacy than aware of having it forced upon us. At its least unpleasant (though still somewhat grating) this comes across as the self-pitying tone of the Thibidault stories, but at its most mannered — in the priggishness of the narrator in the opening story who masks his insecurity behind an aura of self-love — or at its most intense — in the self-loathing that runs through all of "Extractions and Contractions" — it makes for a strained, rather schizoid, relationship between the reader and the teller of the tale.

But these are small reservations, and *A North American Education* is a work worth reading for its sharply drawn portrait of a man adrift between three cultures: the United States, English Canada, French Canada. The book is full of the knowledge gained by individuals enrolled in Blaise's North American classrooms, of the kind of hard lessons that must be mastered by the small boy of the final story, a young French-Canadian growing up in Florida: "that whatever the comforting vision before him... something dreadful could suddenly cut him down without warning"; "that nothing secret and remote was ever lost in the world, was ever perfectly private." Or, catching a strange and monstrous fish of some sort and having it mysteriously devoured before he can bring anyone to see it, the sense that "the fish at his feet or whatever it had been, had seen the worst thing in the world, whatever that was. The boy knew now that both things existed, the unnameable fish and the thing that had eaten it, and knowing that, he felt he had seen the worst thing too."

This is the essence of Blaise's method. The innocence of a small boy fishing, an idyll that turns suddenly sinister — for the catch is never the expected bream nor the longed-for perch; instead dredged up from the depths are those submerged moments of memory when the world was stripped of its illusions and was seen without those confidence-inspiring appearances we have all been taught to seek. In one of the work's epigraphs Blaise quotes Sartre on the way that memory condenses "into a single mythic moment the contingencies and perpetual rebeginnings of an individual human history." This is a part of Blaise's method surely, but the rest is to choose a certain

kind of moment even among these, what he has described as the incident which contains "the hint of unfathomable complexity, the insolent infinity that defeats our humanity". Or as the narrator at the end of "Words for Winter" says, "I who live in dreams have suffered something real, and reality hurts like nothing else in this world."

RUSSELL M. BROWN

LETTERS

SIR,

Having been mystified by the lack of critical attention paid in Canada to the work of Mavis Gallant I was delighted to read Peter Stevens' very acute article on this fine writer in *Canadian Literature* No. 56. Perhaps it was the expatriate nature of her writing or possibly the lack of flamboyance which caused this inexplicable neglect. I hope Mr. Stevens' article will direct new attention to her.

R. A. D. FORD

SIR,

I would hate to leave readers of "A Poet Past and Future," the amusing article by Patrick Anderson in the Spring issue, with the impression that I am "the most incommunicative and letter-shy of editors." After all, editors should be responsive people, if not responsible persons, and should this canard get around, it would be bad for business.

For the record: I answered all the letters Mr. Anderson sent me, not that there were that many, and I did so with great pleasure, if not despatch. Why, on one occasion I even sent him a cable. I wonder how many editors send cables these days?

JOHN ROBERT COLOMBO

ON THE VERGE

*** Heather Robertson. *Reservations are for Indians.* James Lewis & Samuel. $4.25. Heather Robertson is a good journalist and a patient investigator, and in *Reservations are for Indians* she presents a stirring account — impressionistic in its vividness yet supported by a solid framework of facts — of what it is and has long been to live as an Indian in Canada. Canada's Indians are not the worst-off people in the world. It would be putting the wrong case to claim that they are as deprived — or anywhere near it — as most people in, say, Bangladesh or Bolivia. And Heather Robertson implies no claim of this kind. What she does reveal and document relentlessly is that in the country that was theirs before anyone else claimed it, the Indians, man for man, are given the chance of enjoying a far smaller share of affluence than any other class of Canadian. It may be argued that affluence is worthless. Well and good. But if affluence exists it should be available for all men to claim or reject according to their inclinations. And this choice, as *Reservations are for Indians* makes abundantly clear, exists less for our native peoples than it does for most other Canadians. So is justice mocked.

*** MARTIN ROBIN. *The Rush for Spoils.* McClelland & Stewart, $5.95. *The Rush for Spoils,* which is sub-titled "The Company Province 1871-1933", is a partial political history of British Columbia; apparently a second volume, bringing the story up to the end of the Social Credit era in 1972, is due to appear shortly. Mr. Robin has an interesting story to tell. Out of a number of possible theses to explain the peculiar politics of British Columbia, he has chosen that which interprets it in terms of the ruthless exploitation of the natural resources of the province by national and international capitalism, with the politicians as the servants of those interests. It makes a dramatic tale of villainy supported by stupidity and servility, but Mr. Robin has perhaps made his case too obvious by adopting a percussively jocose manner and a style which one can only call political commentator's baroque. He has some good anecdotes, some curious revelations, and some sharp insights. They would have been more convincing if they had been more simply told.

FROM TALONBOOKS THIS FALL POETRY BY DOUGLAS BARBOUR SONGBOOK BILL BISSETT PASS TH FOOD RELEASE TH SPIRIT BOOK VICTOR COLEMAN SPEECH SUCKS FRANK DAVEY THE CLALLAM GARY GEDDES SNAKEROOT GERRY GILBERT SKIES BP NICHOL LOVE A BOOK OF REMEMBRANCES STEPHEN SCOBIE STONE POEMS PLAYS BY RICHARD BENNER THE LAST OF THE ORDER JACKIE CROSSLAND AND RUDY LAVALLE RINSE CYCLE HERSCHEL HARDIN ESKER MIKE AND HIS WIFE AGILUK ERIC NICOL PILLAR OF SAND JAMES REANEY APPLE BUTTER AND OTHER PLAYS FOR CHILDREN JAMES REANEY COLOURS IN THE DARK JAMES REANEY LISTEN TO THE WIND GEORGE RYGA CAPTIVES OF THE FACELESS DRUMMER GEORGE RYGA THE ECSTASY OF RITA JOE GEORGE RYGA SUNRISE ON SARAH BEVERLEY SIMONS CRABDANCE DAVID WATMOUGH ASHES FOR EASTER AND OTHER MONODRAMAS FICTION BY AUDREY THOMAS SONGS MY MOTHER TAUGHT ME PHOTOGRAPH BY TALONBOOKS TALONBOOKS AT THE TOP OF THE HEAP OR HOW FAR DO YOU EXPECT TO GO ON 'CANADIAN' MONEY TALONBOOKS 201 1019 EAST CORDOVA VANCOUVER 6 BRITISH COLUMBIA CANADA THE WEST COAST PUBLISHERS AND PRINTERS

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